

PERDITA
A ROMANCE IN BIOGRAPHY



Allen & Gledhill, Ltd., So.

Mary Robinson (Pordita)

From a photograph by Clegg and Butterworth of the picture by Gaullborough in the Wallace Collection

PERDITA

A ROMANCE IN BIOGRAPHY

By

STANLEY V. MAKOWER

WITH SEVENTEEN
ILLUSTRATIONS

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ERRATA

Page 10, line 2: *for* Montague *read* Montagu.
Page 59, line 17: *for* uncle *read* relative.

PERDITA

A Romance in Biography

I

HER picture hangs in a place of honour in the long room at Hertford House, a conspicuous example of beauty that provokes the spectator like a challenge, allied with an acuteness of portraiture striking even in that gallery of masterpieces. Other portrayals of Mary Robinson arouse interest or command homage. In the same room one is tempted to raise the hat to Romney's stylish canvas, a head and shoulders conveying the sense of a woman, young, bewitchingly fair, with a careless effrontery in the folds of her high white cap and the turn of her head. She seems to be walking briskly, with step made more than ordinarily elastic by the sting of the winter air. Her hands are in her muff and her eyes bespeak the recent recognition of some passer-by. In the portrait by Reynolds on the same wall, also a head and shoulders, she looks older, and in place of movement is the almost statuesque repose of a head in profile. Her expression is of one preoccupied ; her eyes do not appear to take in the prospect of the turbid sea towards which they are turned. Clearly she is thinking. But of what?

All that can be said is, her thoughts are chosen by the artist at a moment unbecoming to her loveliness ; and curiosity, however high it rises, does not soften wonder into admiration.

The full-length picture of Gainsborough does not resemble the others. Indeed it is not long since surmise gave place to the certainty that this strangely beautiful figure is no other than Mary Robinson. But the discovery, while it silences the high voices of art critics at variance, opens the lips of her apologist for the first time. Sadness and pride look out from beneath those relentless eyebrows, a sadness and a pride made inextinguishable by the painter's genius. She is seated in an attitude of stiffness made doubly perceptible by the haunting slightness of her limbs. As if to heighten the effect of superb but sorrowful condescension in the human figure, a white fox dog, embodying the very spirit of restless merriment, rests for a moment at her side, a creature made for boisterous gambol on a lawn. The parted jaws, the panting vigour, and the sanguine life in the eye of the animal are what first provoke a comment from the casual spectator, and the liveliness of this impression deepens for him the neighbouring melancholy of the lady's mien as he glances upwards. Everywhere the picture is one of strong contrasts. The light gossamer of her dress, the delicate fairness of her flesh, emerge from the sombre richness of dark foliage passing from her immediate neighbourhood into the familiar distinctness of Gainsborough's blue-green trees bending their feathery heads one towards the other up a gently rising slope of park land.

I have spoken of the sadness and the pride in that

face, but these words do not exhaust the contents of its message. She looks listless, disdainful. Ill-tempered? Perhaps. In her right hand she holds a circular miniature—is it of some soldier in scarlet uniform? Did the painter place it there for the value of that tiny splash of colour? Or has it some bearing on her life? When once the face of Gainsborough's Mary becomes a centre of study excluding observation of the other pictures in the room, her eyes pursue the spectator with a steady appeal for comprehension. Compassion? We shall see. It is a face with a story; and when the pleasure of idly wondering who she was, where she lived and what she did, yields to the pursuit of practical inquiry, we find the gates of research wide open to a domain of mingled reality and romance in which enchantment and disenchantment tread upon each other's heels, and almost every fresh turn of the road discloses a prospect to arouse the sympathy or the indignation, the sorrow or the scorn of humanity.

The rain was beating in torrents against the casements of Mrs. Darby's chamber on the night of the 27th of November, 1758. Even at that date no place in Bristol was richer in historical associations than the Minster House with its pinnacled tower and its disconcerting architectural compromise between the ancient and the modern styles. Wedged in between the cathedral and the cloisters of St. Augustine's monastery, its most cheerful aspect could be observed from the narrow windows of the room facing a small garden of which the gates opened upon what then was

called Minster Green. It was a house of which the construction was intricately gloomy, and for the student of romance, as for the painter, its most characteristic setting was just such a night of wind and tempest-wracked clouds as that on which Mrs. Darby gave birth to her third child. The imagination pictures it "cased in the unfeeling armour of old time" braving the lightning; and the terrors of the storm, made all the more alarming for a sensitive woman by the peril of her condition, impressed themselves so vividly on her mind that in after life she never spoke of that rueful sky without a tremor.

There was a strong reason for the peculiar affection lavished upon Mary by her mother in later life. She was born between two domestic calamities. An elder sister died of the smallpox barely a couple of years before the year 1758; a younger brother died at the age of six from a malignant attack of measles. John, the eldest of the family, and George, Mary's younger brother, were settled early in their career as merchants at Leghorn. Their avocation no less than the distance at which they lived prevented them from taking any very lively interest in their sister's career. Inheriting their father's instinct for trading, and directing it into a tolerably lucrative channel, they lived and died in the respectable region of activity which they had carved out for themselves. The very reputation for respectability to which they made just claim, would have perished with them but for the light shed upon it by the vicissitudes of their illustrious sister's life.

As a little child Mary was much influenced by the portentous gloom of the Minster House. From her

nursery she could hear the chaunting of the choristers at morning and evening service ; one of the rooms in the house had originally formed part of the monastery itself, and when she read Horace Walpole's "Castle of Otranto," as she must have done very soon after its appearance in 1765, the scenes of the novel associated themselves inevitably with the terrors, rising nimbly to her mind as she wandered through the old house to the twilight of the monastic chamber with its mysterious winding staircase. Fancy pictures the child half frightened, half amused as she stands on the last step and peers at the iron spiked door which led to the cloisters beneath. That there is nothing extraordinary in the supposition that Mary read "The Castle of Otranto" when she was no more than seven years of age, may be gathered from the fact that at this time she was able to recite Pope's "Elegy to the Memory of an Unfortunate Lady." She had already had lessons on the harpsichord for two years and could sing Gay's ballad " 'Twas when the Sea was Roaring" and "The Heavy Hours," a poem by the father of one who was destined to come into her life at a critical period.

Walpole's wit forsook him not only when he wrote "Otranto" but when he ultimately consented to acknowledge its paternity. Had he preserved the secret in his own time, it is highly improbable that a critical examination of his other works would have led to its discovery in ours. But the success of the book was due to the extravagance of the situations depicted, and as a milestone in the long road of English fiction it deserves study. People wanted to be frightened in those days, and the cold, deliberate ingenuity with

which Walpole frightened them in the pages of his novel provided a high example of misdirected skill which reaped the reward of European popularity. At the age of seven Mary Darby's imagination was quite as fully developed as that of most people ten years later, but the clue to her early psychology lies in comprehending how nearly her childish affinity for the supernatural manifestation of ghosts in an environment of gloom and mystery corresponded with the inspiration of such works as "The Castle of Otranto." She had an inveterate propensity for lurking in the most uncanny places to which she could gain access. Thus, while her brothers were romping on the Minster Green she would creep under the great brass eagle of the cathedral itself, the lectern from which the lessons of the day were read, and here she would remain for as long a time as she could escape the observation of the sexton. Cold weather did not keep her from her cherished place of meditation, and when at last "Black John" (as the sexton was called, from the colour of his beard and complexion) detected her in hiding, she loved to represent to herself the reiterated appearance of this "mysterious visitant" as an occasion foreboding all kinds of delightful terrors to come. Had the Chamber of Horrors existed in those days, Mary Darby would have sought to commune with its mute occupants at dead of night. Very likely she would have fainted in the attempt, but the temptation to test herself would have been irresistible. As it was, the depressing effect of "Gothic" architecture upon the spirits did duty for the loathsome verisimilitude of waxen effigies to plunge the mind into an atmosphere of preternatural

horror and impossible crime. A wiser mother than Mrs. Darby might have checked these impulses in her daughter with some severity ; but the danger of indulging them was less apparent then than it is now, when the psychology of child life has been reduced to something like a practical science. When Mary crossed the borderland which divided the ghosts from the substantial cruelties of life, it was too late, but it is important to remember through all these varying fortunes the peculiar quality of that romantic leaning which was cultivated as a virtue in her childhood. She was eminently the creature of her age, and in the narrative of her life we see reflected more perfectly than in that of greater contemporaries the fashions and the follies of English thought and English imagination in the latter half of the eighteenth century.

II

EXCEPT for the penalties exacted by a propensity to melancholy and a rare intellectual precocity, Mary's early childhood was happy enough. If Bristol was "the dirtiest great shop" that Walpole ever saw, its merchant princes who grew rich on the purchase and sale of slaves knew how to make the most of their prosperity. The Minster House soon grew too small to satisfy the social needs of Captain Darby. Moreover it was a house ill suited by the irregularity of its construction for the entertainment of company on a large scale. The family moved accordingly into a larger house of more recent date, and here for the twilight that peeped with such fascination for Mary through the Gothic windows was substituted the healthier influence of broad daylight pouring through wider casements. At the same time the lavish equipment of the household provided the child with a new order of impressions, and her memory of this period in later life was associated with an elegant table upon which the regular appearance of foreign wines proclaimed at once the taste and prosperity of her father, a bed of the richest crimson damask, dresses of fine cambric, silk upholstered furniture, and a holiday on Clifton Hill during the summer months. Among all these luxurious surroundings the daintiest object was the little Mary herself, and it was the prettiest sight

in the world to see the child's large eyes grow wide over a lesson on the harpsichord or the recitation of an elegy. Sometimes she composed verses herself, and the facile doggerel was extolled with more generosity than wisdom by the tenderhearted mother and the reckless, prodigal father. When the mail packet from London arrived in Bristol she would go and watch them unload the parcels and hope there was one for her, as there pretty often was, for these fond parents indulged her caprices even to the tune of sending all the way to London for her clothes ; and in those days "The Flying Machine" itself could not do the distance from London to Bristol in less than "the amazingly short space of 24 hours if God permit." Not only fine clothes and accomplished manners were held requisite for Mary's education. In the year of her birth the More sisters had come to Bristol and founded a school in the neighbourhood of the Minster House. Their success enabled them a few years later to take a larger house in Park Street. Here they taught French, Reading, Writing, Arithmetic, Needlework and Dancing, and took in boarders.

Mary Darby attended the school in the morning and was a fellow pupil with Priscilla Hopkins, who became the wife of the actor John Kemble. The Mores were sisters of the celebrated Hannah, whose lively writings and innumerable activities must be studied to gain a conception of the educational ideas of the time. How different was her idea of "a suitable education for each and Christianity for all" from that of the showier Amazons of learning in her own day—not to mention the elaborate pretensions of the modern Board School. Yet Hannah's practical

piety feared nothing from the blue assemblages of Mrs. Vesey or Mrs. Montague. Certainly in the course of her long life she changed some of her opinions, and towards its close she would have disapproved of the views which allowed her sisters to take their whole school, including Mary Darby, to see Mr. Powel in a performance of "King Lear."

It was Mary's first experience of the theatre, probably her first introduction to Shakespeare ; but while much of the original text was recited, the play had suffered considerable alteration. Mr. Garrick's versions were then the order of the day, and Garrick took more liberties with his text (with, no doubt, far greater excuse) than any actor of to-day. But Mary was too young to take account of such abstruse matters. For her the story was the main thing, and her heart ached for the sorrows of the aged Lear. Can we not see that eager face intent upon the tragic scenes? So keenly does she feel the situations, that she chafes at the incompetence of Mrs. Fisher's Cordelia. Truly the actress was overweighted by the superior dramatic force of her companion. She ambled mildly through the part. She felt nicely about it, but the spark of her affection for her father glowed dimly even to the last. Hear her towards the close. Are not those accents too tame in which she cries :

O look upon me, Sir,
And hold your hand in blessing o'er me; nay
You must not kneel.

Mary, child that she was, would have liked to jump from her seat upon the stage and say those words again as they should be said. The nobility of the thing fills her with a new kind of enthusiasm. What

are Pope's "Lines to the Memory of an Unfortunate Lady" compared with this? When she comes home, she is silent, preoccupied; and the questions of her family about Mr. Powel's Benefit performance receive scant answer. They expect her to be in a flutter of high spirits, to strike attitudes in imitation of the principal performers, but while they tease her for not showing more appreciation, the effect upon her of this first insight into the genius of drama is deep enough to escape altogether a superficial observation.

And so far as their little daughter was concerned the observation of both her parents was indeed superficial. Captain Darby had not the time to understand his children, his wife had not the capacity; both were content to accept the flattering comment aroused by Mary's beauty, without disturbing the fulness of their satisfaction by an unsparing examination of the character which underlay those graces. True she was impetuous, even wilful at times; but the peccadilloes of obstinacy were more than compensated by gusts of affection which were enough to disarm any misgivings even in parents of sterner discipline than the Darbys.

With a marriage contracted against the wishes of her parents Mrs. Darby had exhausted her stock of courage. She was between twenty and thirty years of age when for the agreeable importunities of numerous suitors, attracted more by the vivacity of her manner than by the formal beauty of her person, was substituted the practical problem of deciding between the virtues of a young gentleman of good family, genuinely if somewhat lugubriously impressed with her charm, and the dashing advances of Captain Darby, who laid siege to her heart with all the natural artifices of an

adventurous spirit quickened by the ardour of a deep infatuation. That he was of Irish extraction (the name Darby having been substituted for that of McDermott on the acquisition of estates in Ireland by a previous generation) was no recommendation to her family ; that he was born American counted as a decided disqualification. Somerset people (and Mary's mother was born in Bridgewater) were not likely to minimise the dangers involved in an alliance with a sea captain whose home influence, whatever it may have been, must have been so remote from the lady's own. Reluctantly they succumbed to the fascination of his presence, and in the eagerness with which they listened to his spirited anecdotes about the glorious perils of the ocean lurked some disquietude. The usual arguments were advanced for dissuading the girl, with the usual result : the roving disposition of Captain Darby would not change in a week or a year ; to which her reply is, that she asks no more than to follow him in his wanderings ; little good ever came from wayward sentiment usurping the throne of reason ; her reply denies the right of appeal to reason in those who sought to marry her in the face of reason to one whom she could never love. The characters of the suitors decide the issue. The eligible young gentleman rests too solemnly upon his merits ; the spirit of courtship is a fountain sealed for one so imperturbably grave. Realising the vanity of his hopes he takes coach for Bristol and embarks on a merchant ship bound for a distant part of the globe, finding a kind of audacity in despair. He is never heard of again by the family. Soon after their marriage at Dunyatt, Somersetshire, Mary's parents settled at Bristol.

Little occurred to mar the serenity of their happiness until Mary entered upon her ninth year. If the husband's irrepressible flow of spirits sometimes tired the equanimity of his less sanguine wife, she knew how to console herself in reflecting on his generous nature and the ready pleasure which he showed in the welfare and happiness of his family. One day early in 1766 Mary found her mother in tears. Her father was striding restlessly up and down the room.

“ ‘Tis the height of folly,” cried her mother between her sobs. “ Reason, prudence, the affections of your family all speak against the execution of so mad an enterprise. A perilous journey, and for what? To meet a treacherous death at the hands of savages ! ”

“ If you would have me die in your company, Madam, you should come too.” And the Captain glanced with a look of affectionate humour and unshaken purpose at his little daughter. “ If you lack the courage, Mary will sail with me.”

The child made no answer. She had stolen to her mother’s side and laid a timid hand upon her shoulder. Mrs. Darby began to cry anew, and with an impatient shrug the Captain left the room, whistling to himself. The next few days were a novel experience for Mary. She had never seen her parents openly at variance before. Something warned her that her father’s decision was unalterable, and yet Mrs. Darby implored him with tears and entreaties to abandon his intentions, or at least to postpone their execution. Mary wondered what was the object of this journey and had not the courage to ask, until one day she found her father poring over a chart, and he took her on his knee and told her how he was going to a place on the other

side of the world where the coast was inhabited by Eskimo Indians ("funny little people, like monkeys," he called them). He was going to teach them how to trade in the whales which they caught. He would make friends with the "monkeys" and bring some home for Mary to see, and Mary was so well entertained by his lively descriptions of how he was going to build himself a hut in a wild forest and shoot game for his meals and take lessons in the Eskimo language from the chief of the tribe himself, that she forgot what the separation would mean for her mother, and began to clap her hands in delight. As the plan became matured in Captain Darby's mind his absences from Bristol became more frequent, and to his wife's sorrow he always returned from a visit to London with fresh accounts of the favour with which his expedition was regarded in high quarters. Not only was it encouraged by the opinions of the Chancellor Lord Northington, who was Mary's godfather, but it received the approbation of Lord Chatham himself. The civilising mission of England had frequently been bound up with the foundation of lucrative industries, and the establishment of flourishing whale fisheries on the coast of Labrador under the control of England or her American colonies might prove no less productive than the Greenland fisheries. It was only a year since Government had erected a blockhouse in a small fort at Château Bay. This was garrisoned by an officer and twenty men from the Governor of Newfoundland's ship, and a sloop of war was stationed here in the summer, no less to prevent encroachments from the French than to protect the merchants and their people from the Indians. Captain Darby's

expedition was to be directed to the north of this region.

England has always welcomed the services of adventurous men like Nicholas Darby, and Chatham's glowing denunciation of American taxation was recent enough still to linger agreeably in the ears of a man, who, although England had become the home of his election, was still an American by birth. What wonder then that the statesman's encouragement, added to that of the Earl of Bristol and other eminent persons whose advice was as readily given as their sympathy was enlisted, should have set spurs to the Captain's intentions. So occupied had he been with the details of the necessary preliminaries, that when the day came for him to depart he realised for the first time what this separation was costing himself no less than his wife ; and the words "I shall be back in two years" faltered on his lips as he took a hurried farewell of his family. The painter Morland has left many a scene of such farewells, in which the grief of the situation is mitigated by the charm of the figures represented in the picture. But "good-bye" meant even more in the eighteenth century than it does to-day, and it was no wonder if it took many weeks before Mrs. Darby recovered some of her spirits. The house was all the quieter for the buoyant nature of the man who had left it ; and to make the circumstances still more melancholy, her eldest son had been placed in a mercantile house in Leghorn shortly before his father's departure.

III

CAPTAIN DARBY's letters were read with eagerness by his solitary wife. The spirited nature of their contents did not allay her apprehensions. Now she feared that he would suffer the consequences of indifferent attention to his health in a climate of freezing coldness, now she shuddered at the dangers of his traffic with the native savages. He made his settlement on Seal Island in a spot as high up the river as a boat could go ; it consisted of his own house, a hut for his servants, and a workshop. In due time a fishing-stage was also erected, and it was not long before Mary and her two little brothers were listening to a description of the neighbouring Indians, their methods of extracting oil from the whales which they caught, and the barbarous habits of the women, whose love for their babies was suffered to co-exist with a revolting indifference to the insanitary conditions in which they were reared. After some months had elapsed, however, Mary noticed that the eagerness with which her mother had opened her husband's letters began to abate. A new and unexplained sorrow began to appear in her face, and sometimes she would leave the mail packet unopened for more than a day after its arrival. The letters came, too, at rarer intervals, and even in the extracts with which Mrs. Darby continued to regale her children, appeared a note of haste and frigidity.

The style grew more laconic, and at last a period of several months passed before once more the familiar seal aroused expectation of fresh news from Labrador.

Fresh news indeed, but never had the reluctance with which Mrs. Darby proceeded to examine it been so fatally well justified. This time the curiosity of the children was allayed by no reading of extracts from the letter. Mrs. Darby shut herself up for several days, and even in the brief intervals in which she allowed her children to bid her good-night, the tears started from eyes worn with long weeping. With difficulty she informed them that their father was well ; but the welcome nature of these tidings was dashed with the bitter self-accusations which followed the announcement. Oh that she had been able to overcome her abhorrence of the great ocean, and accompanied her husband ! Prior to the arrival of this letter, a stranger had come to the house, while the family were still in a state of anxious suspense as to the origin of the Captain's long silence. He said he was an intimate friend of Mr. Darby, and had grave news to impart to his wife. Mary watched him wistfully as the servant showed him into her mother's private apartments. The burden of his message was not communicated to the child, who thought, when he had gone, her mother had never before looked so sad. A day later the letter was delivered, but the hopes roused by its arrival were but a source of further disappointment.

Mrs. Darby went about like one distracted. Every fresh inquiry of Mary met with fresh evasion. One day when the child was playing with her wardrobe (she was always particularly fond of arranging her dresses) her mother bade her leave them aside, for

they no longer belonged to her. Her father had given a bill of sale of his whole property, and to rescue him from his embarrassments his wife and children were by this sudden tide of misfortune compelled to change their manner of life from one of refinement and ease to one of coarse hardship and penury. For the mock tragedy of Lear which had so powerfully affected Mary's imagination but a little while ago was now substituted the cutting reality of actual misfortunes. People who had envied the prosperity of the Darbys were not slow to condemn the expensive style in which they had carried on their household. The illness and death of little William added sorrow to want, and the multiplied afflictions of the Darby family became a topic for commiseration at all the public receptions in Bristol. The humiliation of their condition was made profounder by the heights of fashionable splendour on which they had lived. Mrs. Darby took consolation in the friendship and kindly offices of a lady now the wife of a medical man, and formerly the widow of Sir Charles Erskine. She knew that Bristol gossip was busy with the retailing of her misfortunes, and she was content to live a life of seclusion. The world was a great deal wider than the confines of Bristol, and she felt the nature of her grief to be larger than that of the idle conversation which it provided in a narrow locality.

In due time Mary was acquainted with the contents, or rather with some of the contents, of that last letter from her father. His scheme had failed. The Indians had risen and murdered three of his servants. His settlement was uprooted. In itself the enterprise was as reasonable as most ventures of the kind, nor was its

failure due so much to a want of foresight as to the temperamental incapacity of Captain Darby for ingratiating himself with the natives. Three years after his settlement had been abandoned, the traces of it were rediscovered by Captain Cartwright, an experienced traveller in Labrador, who succeeded in winning the confidence of the Eskimos and actually brought some of them to London. George III. stopped reviewing his troops to converse with the strange captain and his odd little companions. They were taken to a reception at Holland House and ultimately to Court, where they formed a pleasing diversion for the aristocracy, some of whom invited them to a fox hunt. But where the long patience of Cartwright succeeded, the restless impetuosity of Darby failed. He was at once too confident and too arrogant ; and, to do him justice, he credited the Eskimo Indian with as little cunning as he himself possessed.

Mrs. Darby had lived in retirement for a year, when, in a letter of which the coldness chilled her no less than the contents agitated her, she was summoned to meet her husband in London. His message included a request that her children should accompany her. Probably he thought their presence would silence his wife's reproaches. It was autumn, and the leaves of the trees in Spring Gardens, where he was lodging, were turning gold. Confronted with his little Mary, now nearly ten years of age and tall enough to be twelve or thirteen, Darby broke down. The scene in its initial stages was indeed affecting enough ; but a sordid reality soon thrust itself between the sweets of reunion. Mrs. Darby had come armed with forgiveness for her erring husband. Again and

again she had blamed herself as the cause of his infidelity. Had she accompanied him, all might have been different. In spite of the sorrow and pain which she expected from the interview, she had not been able to stifle the hope of its satisfactory issue. He had come back to her. Perhaps this other woman who had pushed her merciless way into his affections had betrayed him. Deeply she felt the bitterness of the humiliation which had been put upon her, but she had prayed for heart of grace to disregard it in the recognition of the blessings bestowed by a providential reconciliation.

But no demands were made upon her power of forgiveness. In place of the contrition which her fancy had painted, she was confronted with Captain Darby's cold defiance. Not only was he utterly indifferent to the impropriety of living with a mistress, but he was devoid of all delicacy in the air with which he announced his immediate intentions to his innocent wife. Mary and her brother were to be placed in a school near London ; a suitable allowance would be provided to enable Mrs. Darby to live in a private family ; as for himself he purposed shortly returning to America. Tears and entreaties seemed only to increase his obduracy. He grew impatient at the heat which had escaped into the conversation, and Mrs. Darby's leave-taking partook almost of the nature of a dismissal. She never indulged another hope in her husband's return. Soon afterwards she took up her abode in a clergyman's family in Chelsea with the object of being near Meribah Lorrington's school, at which her children were placed.

A queerer couple than Mrs. Lorrington and her

father, Mr. Hull, it would have been hard to discover, even in a town offering such diversity of persons and characters as London. Hull had been master of an academy at Earl's Court. He was now a widower, and aided his daughter in the instruction of pupils at Chelsea. If he did not teach them much, he succeeded in inspiring them with a well-founded terror of his appearance, for he wore a long silvery beard and a kind of Persian robe which invested him with the air of a necromancer. His conversation was stern rather than erudite, and he was of the Anabaptist persuasion. Had he been born in the first half of the sixteenth instead of the first half of the eighteenth century, there is some ground for suspecting that he would have become a follower of John of Leyden and danced about naked in that "city of God" which became the scene of excesses as bad as any that have ever disfigured the annals of religious fanaticism. As it was, he was a mixture of fantastic affectation and intolerant ineptitude which inspired Mary Darby with a lively disgust. For his daughter, on the contrary, she conceived a warm affection. Meribah represented for her something very grand and alluringly tragic, a kind of widowed Cordelia whose sorrows were made all the more pathetic by the ridiculous neighbourhood of a sham Lear. In blue learning she towered above the Mores, for she knew Latin besides French and Italian, and possessed a nodding acquaintance with the stars besides a ready familiarity with the Multiplication Tables. As if to make feminine atonement for her masculine intelligence, her painting on silk showed a refinement of fancy that was a model for all the young ladies in the kingdom. The tragic

element in her composition was an irrepressible passion for drink, engendered, as she told her little friend one night in a burst of confidence (they slept in the same chamber) by the despair and solitude of widowhood. What a companionship—this of the tender, precocious child and the clever, half crazy woman. Think of Meribah and Mary looking across the Chelsea fields from the casement window of their bedroom on a summer's night, the governess babbling in her drunken way of the stars, and Mary fondly composing verses on the moon in the style of the late Mr. William Shenstone. They used to read to each other after school hours. As Meribah's intemperance gained ground, she clung with increased tenacity to the friendship of her favourite pupil. She now frequently entered the class-room in a state of intoxication. Parents began to withdraw their children. The financial status of the school became hopelessly embarrassed, and Mary had only been a year and two months in her new surroundings when the establishment was broken up. She was removed to Mrs. Leigh's seminary in Battersea, her brother remaining in Chelsea under the care of a clergyman.

In place of the strange companionship of Mrs. Lorrington she now enjoyed the healthier intimacy of Mrs. Leigh's daughter, a girl but a few years older than herself, and suited by the amiability of her disposition to be an agreeable playmate. Mrs. Darby, isolated as she was from daily intercourse with her children, never lost sight of them for long. Every Sunday evening Mary went to Chelsea to drink tea with her mother. Among the visitors she met on these occasions was a captain in the British

Navy, a friend of her father's. Conceive the high state of perturbation into which Mrs. Darby was plunged when the gallant officer suddenly confronted her with a formal proposal for her daughter's hand. How old, she asked him, did he think the child to be? The inflammable youth had probably never considered her age until this moment, and found it difficult to believe that she had not yet reached her thirteenth birthday. His attentions had in no way disconcerted Mary; she had been accustomed to flattery almost from her infancy, and so little idea had she of love as a practical factor in life, that she had already wasted many hours in composing poetical phantasies on love.

They were published soon after her marriage in a volume of poems, remarkable chiefly for their profuse punctuation, although here and there are lines showing that she had studied her models, even at that early age, with discrimination. Her facility for literary expression intensifies rather than helps to diminish the obscurities of her character as a child; for while these effusions were intimate enough to make her conceal them from her mother until shortly before their appearance in print, the cocksureness of their form bore all the traces of a skilled technique in verse such as one might expect to find in an accomplished writer of at least double her age. The sentiments of the poems were in all probability no more original than the language in which they were expressed, but the fact that she spent so much time in versifying is an indication of innocence rather than of guile, and it came easily to her to sing the praises of retirement "Far from op'ra, park or play," to

rebuke the youths of “this licentious age,” to sentimentalise on Charity and to sigh gracefully after a virtuous husband in a poem of many stanzas.

But while she is thus harmlessly engaged in a schoolgirl’s recreation with more than a schoolgirl’s dexterity—behold a bold captain is actually on his knees in the act of proposing to a mere child. Had he seen her poems he would have adhered obstinately to his belief that she was not so young as her mother wished to paint her. And who could have blamed him? In some confusion he now took his leave, but not without expressing a hope that on his return to England (for he was going on an expedition for two years) Miss Darby might still be disengaged. A few months after his departure came the news that his ship had foundered at sea, and that he had perished in the disaster. And what does Mary when she hears the sad tidings? Does she blush, or faint or cry? Not a bit of it. She is a child with an insatiable love of making verses. She meditates upon a new poem: “To one who perished gallantly at sea.”

IV

MARY's sojourn at Mrs. Leigh's seminary was interrupted by the consequences of her father's reckless living and of his passion for speculative adventure. He had failed in Labrador ; but failure with him set spurs to another attempt in a similar direction. In the meanwhile his remittances to his wife became less regular. Mrs. Darby took alarm at the situation. Few occupations were open to women ; neither her own bringing up nor the subsequent luxuries which she had enjoyed in the early years of her married life had tended to cultivate in her a capacity for earning a livelihood. But necessity stared her in the face, and, encouraged by the advice of her friends, she started a boarding-school of her own. A house at Little Chelsea was hired and suitably furnished, assistants were engaged, and at the age of fourteen Mary passed from the subserviency of a pupil into the commanding consequence of a teacher. Her literary skill was now directed to the choice of suitable passages in prose and verse for the study of her pupils. She also superintended their wardrobes, and read sacred and moral lessons to them on Saints' days and Sunday evenings.

Soon after the establishment of the new school, a dramatic rencounter with her former mistress both excited a genuine compassion and heightened her

sense of the new importance with which the inequalities of life had invested her. Drunk, dishevelled, her dress torn and filthy, an old bonnet lurching forward so as almost to conceal her features, Mrs. Lorrington appeared one summer evening at the gate of the school-house. Her groans attracted the attention of Mary, who was seated at the window. Without knowing whom she was befriending, she hastened to the forlorn creature's aid. Meribah burst into tears. "Don't you know me?" she cried. Mary never forgot the look of misery and wounded pride which came into those familiar eyes as they met hers. Mrs. Darby was out, and the girl took her old teacher into the house, dressed her, comforted her as best she could, and entreated her to say how she had come into so piteous a plight and where she might be found in the future in case of need. But Mrs. Lorrington was either too much ashamed or too much intoxicated to provide any information. Perhaps she thought she was once more the mistress of her own seminary, and regarded Mary's solicitude as presumption in a pupil. She promised to call again in a few days, and with sorrow Mary watched the melancholy attempt at self-possession with which she took her exit.

The fortunes of Mrs. Darby and her daughter began to mend as soon as the merits of her establishment became known, and it was not long before she had a dozen pupils. Some strain was put upon her powers of activity in supervising their requirements, but when she had time for reflection she enjoyed the satisfaction afforded by a success which gave every promise of continuance. Her personal happiness had

been irretrievably ruined through the passionate follies of her husband ; but her sense of duty to her daughter had been quickened by misfortune, and in the knowledge that she was fulfilling that duty both practically and honourably in employing Mary to aid in the development of her school, she found solace. No sooner, however, had her mind recovered some of its composure, than her husband, who had unexpectedly returned from another visit to America, once more made havoc of her cherished projects. On the discovery that his wife was earning her livelihood, the spendthrift Darby's indignation knew no bounds. The appeal to reason always infuriated the man ; his tyrannical nature completely shut his eyes to the fact that by his conduct he had forfeited all claim to be consulted as to the best course for his family to pursue. At the mention of creditors he stamped ; they could afford to wait, did wait to be paid by others, a doubt of whose solvency gave far better ground for anxiety than his own. With the acquisition of fresh resources his pride was once more aflame. Temporary embarrassment had but added fuel to that smouldering fire. He would not, no, he would not, suffer his wife and daughter one minute longer to be associated with so humiliating a life as was involved in the conduct of a school. Mrs. Darby's judgment, naturally cool, was clouded by the vehemence of his protests. She trembled under the uncontrolled fury of his outbursts, and her weakness for the affection that had once been hers condoned a submission to his will which her intellect could not justify. After a brief and successful career of eight months her school was closed.

Having removed the cause of his own humiliation, Captain Darby now proceeded calmly to humiliate his wife by living publicly with his mistress in Green Street, Grosvenor Square, while a suitable lodging for Mrs. Darby and Mary was engaged in the neighbourhood of Marylebone. The effrontery of his behaviour was all the more impudent for the amazing candour which accompanied it ; for he would call frequently upon his family and take walks in the fields near Marylebone with Mary. He would speak of his own failing on these occasions with the detached air of a sympathetic spectator contemplating the private misfortunes of a friend ; life was indeed unscrupulous and exacting in its demands upon human nature ; how infinitely distressing was the situation in which he found he was placed ; time and obligations had cemented an attachment for his Elenor which could not be dissolved without making ample provision for her ; it was very hard for everybody concerned. Sometimes he gazes with a grotesque mixture of pity and hatred at his daughter—as if upon her sex lay the heavy burden of his own misspent life ; but the ugly humour passes in a flash of careless gaiety as they roam through the fields, and he draws a comic picture of the Eskimo settlement, impersonating the chief of the tribe and rolling his eyes horribly while he improvises a rapid speech in their jargon, until the wondering Mary is overwhelmed in a tempest of laughter.

One day they call at Lord Northington's in Berkeley Square, and Mary is presented as the goddaughter of his father, the late Chancellor. Captain Darby dines at his lordship's house a few days later to

discuss his new projects ; and when the nobleman pays him a compliment upon the subject of his daughter's beauty, yet another depth in her father's bottomless vanity is stirred. He goes away reflecting less on the business he had come to discuss than on the necessity of putting the finishing points to his Mary's education. In pursuit of this object she is placed at Oxford House, Marylebone. Soon afterwards Captain Darby again leaves England, taking a theatrical farewell of his family and scaring his wife into new apprehensions by the fierceness of his parting injunction. "Take care that no dishonour falls upon my daughter," he cried, turning back to take a last look at Mary on the threshold of the door. "If she is not safe at my return, I will annihilate you."

How came it that the thought entered his head ? Had the compliments of young Northington aroused his suspicions ? Perhaps the reckless youth of the nobleman's father, with whom he had been on terms of intimacy, had come into his mind when he was in the company of the son. The elder Henley's death was recent in his memory, and he had not forgotten the melancholy humour with which the old man, who had become crippled with gout, had exclaimed shortly before his decease, "If I had known these legs were one day to carry a Chancellor, I had taken better care of them when I was a lad."

At Mrs. Hervey's academy Mary's taste in literature took a new departure. She read Shakespeare and Rowe, and her interest in dramatic poetry rose high above her former delight in melancholy elegiacs. She burned to compose a tragedy, and frequently Mrs. Hervey surprised her in the retirement of her chamber

in the evening in the act of impersonating the heroines of the plays she had been reading during the day. The character of Jane Shore appealed to her with singular force, not the Jane Shore of history, “the merriest harlot in the realm,” but the Jane Shore of Nicholas Rowe’s tragedy, in which the lady appears as divinely repentant, persecuted to death by scheming Gloucester for her loyalty to the cause of the little prince whose royal father had snatched her—a mere child—from a devoted husband’s side. So impressed was Mrs. Hervey with these exhibitions of her talent, that it was not long before the ballet-master of Covent Garden, who taught dancing at Oxford House, was singing her praises to Thomas Hull, the friend of Shenstone and the actor-manager of Covent Garden Theatre.

Hull made an appointment for her to come and recite to him. He smiled dubiously when the girl was introduced to him. Long experience as an actor had taught him to place little faith in other people’s recommendations of genius in the bud. Of course there were exceptions ; about ten years before, a little German boy of no more than eight years had astounded London by his performances on the harpsichord ; he was now about the same age as Miss Darby, and was said to be earning money by writing Italian operas. But this was music—of which Hull knew nothing. If he smiled at the youthfulness of Mary, he could not help laughing when in answer to his inquiry as to what she would recite, she calmly replied, “Some passages from Mr. Rowe’s ‘Jane Shore.’” Hull settled himself in an easy attitude of attention, and the trial began. She started

with the description of her altered beauty in a voice of slowly rising sadness. As she stood there, radiant with the pride of her own juvenile beauty, there was something pathetically incongruous in the convinced melancholy with which she recited the lines :

No roses bloom upon my fading cheek,
No laughing graces wanton in my eyes;

but the smile that lingered in the actor's face vanished at the sharp note of pain in her voice as she continued :

But haggard grief, lean-looking sallow care
And pining discontent, a rueful train,
Dwell on my brow, all hideous and forlorn.

Not only were the lines recited with appropriate dramatic force, but with a precision that made Hull admit that she spoke them almost as if she might have written them. He tried her in other passages : in the appeal from the importunate addresses of Lord Hastings ; in that scene of desolation when the door of her dear friend is shut upon her ; in the speech on the fate of the little princes. His admiration grew with each experiment. How had she come by this ease of diction ? What was the secret of her impenetrable self-possession ? He bade her recite the passage in which one false step in a woman is described as bringing in its train irretrievable ruin, and waited eagerly to hear how she would speak the line :

She sets, like stars that fall, to rise no more.

Her intonation was perfect. Hull asked to hear nothing further : she would of course need practice in gesture and familiarity with the stage, but the

distinction of her presence and the quality of her voice enabled him to speak of her ambition in terms of warm encouragement.

It needed more, however, than the approval of Mr. Hull to satisfy Mrs. Darby of the wisdom of advising her daughter to adopt the stage as a career. Certainly some means of gaining a livelihood must be discovered, for Darby's second venture in America was faring no better than his first, and from an economical point of view no profession could be more precarious than dependence for the necessities of life on that quarter. To resume her school after so recent a disestablishment was next to impossible. Again and again she regretted the weakness which had allowed her to submit in this matter to her husband's tyrannical demands. But the perils and temptations of so public a career as that of the stage were grave arguments against its adoption by her daughter. If Mrs. Darby said nothing, her thoughts were none the less busy as she listened to Mary's delighted account of her visit to Mr. Hull. But the bolt of the girl's ambitions had already been loosed; and it gained strength in its passage in the course of that memorable evening spent soon afterwards at No. 5, Adelphi Terrace, Mr. Garrick's town house. Imagine Mary's excitement when after much discussion the actor, then at the zenith of his fame, actually proposed to play Lear, one of his greatest impersonations, to the Cordelia of Miss Darby. In her mind's eye she already saw the crowded faces in the audience, and the huzzas sounded in her ears. A few years ago in Bristol she had envied Mrs. Fisher when she saw her play Cordelia to the Lear of Garrick's pupil. But now here was the master himself offering to pay



From an engraving by J. Condé, after a miniature by R. Cosway.
MELANIA (MARY ROBINSON).

a girl of scarce fifteen the greatest public compliment within his power.

At the first words she spoke, Garrick's attention was riveted on her. Years had flown over his head since the death of his favourite Mrs. Cibber. "Tragedy is dead on one side," he had exclaimed when they had brought him the news; and now as he listened to Mary Darby it seemed to him that the haunting beauty of the dead lady's voice lived again in the syllables that fell from the child's lips.

Garrick was close on sixty when he first made the acquaintance of his young pupil. But she was not more youthful in her gaiety than he. Indeed in the temper of his spirits he was the younger of the two. Or was it the habitual gravity of Mary that challenged all the mirth in his nature to its surface? He made her sing to him the favourite ballads of the day, danced minuets with her and used every opportunity to liberate her, in her own interest, from the fetters of self-consciousness. His "prodigious play of eye" both attracted and awed her. Sometimes her gravity irritated him. He suspected she could be roguish enough when the whim took her, and he repeatedly urged upon her the necessity of putting the whole of her nature into her art. It was this power of projecting all the mysterious fascination of his personality into the most different rôles that made Kitty Clive once exclaim as she watched him from the wings of the theatre: "Damn him! He could act a gridiron."

In order to quicken his pupil's sense of the value of reality, to free her vision from the cloud of superficial illusion in which the casual playgoer is wrapped, he recommended her to visit the theatre as much as

possible ; for the performer, acting, in the high sense of the word, could only begin where the accompanying consciousness that this was "acting" left off ; there could be no perfect illusion for the spectator so long as the player was hampered by the illusion of an artificial barrier between himself and the audience. In obedience to Mr. Garrick's instructions Mrs. Darby and her daughter now attended the theatre frequently, and gratefully accepted the offer of rooms in Southampton Buildings, Chancery Lane, which was made by the lawyer Samuel Cox at the suggestion of Garrick himself. Thus they were situated within an easy distance of Drury Lane, and the venerable and respected character of their host offered some solace to the mother, who began to be tortured by new anxieties as to the safety of her daughter. It was all very well to repose in the security offered by the fact that Hannah More herself had added respectability to theatrical life by her intimacy with the Garricks and her boundless enthusiasm for Mr. Garrick's performances. But Hannah was nearly thirty years of age, and the remoteness of her own profession from that of the stage placed no restrictions on the liberty with which she could afford to express her opinion. In the meanwhile the gossip of the town had centred in the circumstances of the recent fracas in Vauxhall, where a party of young libertines (they were described in the newspapers of the time as "Macaronies") had molested the beautiful Mrs. Hartley. And Mrs. Hartley was an actress. The parting threat of her husband added terror to Mrs. Darby's reflections and recurred to her memory with haunting frequency. She had only too good reason to believe that Captain

Darby did not talk only at random about the profligacy of the age. Her fears were soon augmented by actual experience.

For several nights in succession an unknown officer in the box occupied by the Darby party at Drury Lane Theatre had pursued Mary with embarrassing attentions. He had been observed hurrying restlessly up and down outside Southampton Buildings after their return from the playhouse. One morning Mary presented her mother with a letter which had just been delivered to her by a female servant. The careless air with which the girl handed her the note little prepared Mrs. Darby for the nature of its contents. It was an offer of marriage from the son of a lady of distinguished birth and position in society : the writer had heard of the young lady's intention of going upon the stage ; Cupid had forced the pen into his hand to protest against so perilous an undertaking ; his heart was deeply engaged ; he was sensible how ill-considered might appear the sudden nature of this declaration with so little to encourage him in the hope of its favourable reception ; but the open quality of his disposition rebelled at the notion of permitting their common friend (he named an acquaintance of the Darbys') to effect an introduction without first apprising them of the motive with which he sought it.

Mrs. Darby admired the candour of the letter, but when she tried to ascertain what effect it had exercised upon her daughter, Mary began tripping about the room and singing. It was in vain that her mother bade her be serious, and complained that her head was too full of these stage matters. " My

mother married not so early. Why should I?" said the girl at last, to which Mrs. Darby answered that her mother was never so giddy as she. Certainly the introduction of the lovesick Captain which followed soon after the delivery of the letter served as an occasion for an outburst of scornful hilarity as soon as his back was turned. Was he not handsome enough, asked Mrs. Darby sharply. "Oh yes, handsome," sighed Mary. Did he fail in accomplishments? "Oh, he's all accomplishment," the girl assented, and then began to laugh at the mixture of embarrassment and amorous solicitude which had marked his behaviour on being presented to her. Mrs. Darby was vexed; she constantly twitted her daughter with her growing absorption in everything to do with the stage. No suitor, she supposed, would stand a reasonable chance of being accepted unless he were an actor. Or did she think to turn the head of Mr. Garrick himself? 'Twas lucky he was married to such a clever wife.

But the taunting humour was short-lived. The friendly introducer of the lovesick Captain arrives one day with a face full of foreboding. He must see Mrs. Darby for a few minutes in private. On his departure the fond mother rushes back to the room where Mary is waiting for some fresh tidings on which to expend her merriment. The look of consternation on her mother's face warns her that something grave has passed. It is some minutes before Mrs. Darby can speak; she is completely unnerved and cries like a child, clinging with renewed vehemence to her Mary at each paroxysm of tears. What does it all mean? Mary listens attentively to catch the words that fall between the sobs from Mrs. Darby's lips; the girl

kisses her mother's hands and seeks to offer consolation with an air of detached affection as if she herself had no concern in the source of all those tears. She soon picks up the thread of her mother's disconnected story. The friendly introducer of the Captain has a conscience which has unexpectedly reared its head and urged its owner to warn the Darbys against the artifices of his lovesick associate. The Captain is married; his wife, young and amiable, away from the town on a visit to friends; there was no telling what course the ardour of his infatuation might induce him to pursue. Mary smiles at the passing memory of a comedy in which the stratagems of the amorous hero in pursuit of the loved object are divertingly portrayed. "I never loved him," she says simply to the humbled mother, who is reduced to taking comfort in the thought that perhaps after all her daughter is not only clever but also wise.

Unfortunately for the poor lady the sources of her anxiety were multiplied almost daily. Mary's frequent appearance in public made her beauty the theme of public discussion. Playgoers soon learned that she was the pupil of Mr. Garrick, who was training her in the part of Cordelia. It was impossible to evade all the numerous introductions which were forced upon her. The artful Captain, unaware that his real character had been exposed, persisted in besieging Miss Darby with letters imploring an explanation of her coldness. To give that explanation would have involved a duel between the friends, and when Mrs. Darby's consternation at the disclosure of the circumstances had subsided, she could not help crediting the chivalrous conduct of the man who betrayed his friend with sentimental

motives of his own. In the meanwhile Mary smiled her way through the importunities of her suitors, her heart touched neither by the extravagant addresses of an aged gentleman of splendid fortune, nor by the obvious confusion which the sight of her at the window of her drawing-room wrought in the bosom of the young lawyer who lived in the opposite house.

“Have you not noted,” she remarked to her mother, “how this young man bows or turns away as if to hide some emotion when I approach the drawing-room window? Why should his pale face redden at the sight of me? I do not blush at myself when I practise my lines before the mirror.”

“Have you already forgotten your father’s warning?” Mrs. Darby answered. “Oh that you were once well married !”

Then she walked to the windows and herself pulled up the shutters. From that day, by her orders, they were never to be lowered.

V

MR. WAYMAN the attorney was a friend of Mr. Cox. This circumstance, added to the merits of a disposition at once grave and cheerful, had secured for him a warm place in Mrs. Darby's esteem. He was a bachelor, under forty, earnest in the pursuit of his profession, agreeable in conversation, studiously polite rather than impetuously chivalrous in his behaviour towards women. There were moments when in the society of others the gravity of Mr. Wayman's expression was replaced by a transient sadness, as if his mind unconsciously reverted to some memory of previous sorrow. Mrs. Darby noted these moods in her friend with curious sympathy. Some early disappointment, she fancied, must be the source of their recurrence. She thought regretfully of the deserving young lover whom she herself had rejected for the dazzling fascination of Captain Darby. What had become of him? From the day that he had set sail from Bristol, not a word had been heard of him. The disparity of age between her daughter and Mr. Wayman arrested all serious thought of their union. But for this consideration she would have liked to regard Mr. Wayman as a possible son-in-law.

Shortly after the altercation between mother and daughter on the subject of the youth who lived in the opposite house, Mr. Wayman proposed an excursion

party to Greenwich. Mrs. Darby with some show of reluctance consented. The day fixed was the Sunday following their conversation, the place, the Star and Garter Hotel. Two carriages were engaged. Mr. Wayman, who undertook the supervision of the arrangements, drove in the company of the Darbys, the other carriage containing the rest of the little party started in advance. The warmth of the September day, freshened by the brisk pace at which the horses trotted, and the unfeigned pleasure of the ladies in the expedition, made Mr. Wayman more than usually talkative. Mrs. Darby admired the justice of his observations on the landscape through which they were passing, no less than the wisdom of his remarks on the agitation in the American Colonies, nor did she conceal her satisfaction at the admiring glances which Mr. Wayman directed at her daughter ; and truly Mary had never looked more bewitching than on this day in her “nightgown” of pale blue lustrine, and her chip hat trimmed with ribbons of the same colour.

On their arrival at the Star and Garter the carriage door was immediately opened from without, but on recognising who it was that had proffered his services so eagerly, a look of surprise, almost of indignation, appeared in Mrs. Darby’s face. Mary blushed as she alighted on the arm of the stranger, and after a moment of hesitation Mr. Wayman formally introduced his friend to the ladies. It was the young lawyer whose singular behaviour at the window of the house opposite their own had been a source of mirth to Mary, and of new anxiety to her mother. He had come in the company of a respectable young married couple, the

husband having been his schoolmate at Harrow. When the first shock of their encounter with the young stranger had subsided, Mrs. Darby and her daughter could not but feel that his manners were superior and his conversation agreeable. The languor of convalescence (for he was recovering from a recent illness) added a charm of interest to features more than ordinarily handsome; nor did the deference which he paid to the opinions of Mr. Wayman fail to extort approbation, however reluctant, from Mrs. Darby. It was to her that he mainly addressed his conversation when he was not appealing to the superiority of Mr. Wayman's judgment on the topics of the day. Of Mary he took little apparent notice, except to attend to her comforts at the table. On several occasions he attempted to draw his schoolfriend and his wife into the conversation, but their natural interest in each other and the easy contentment felt by both in the mere circumstances of the party tended to liberate them from the responsibilities of expressing many opinions. Soon the talk of the others fell on Mr. Garrick, and from Mr. Garrick on the theatrical profession.

"I cannot help thinking," said the young man, "that the home of great eloquence ought rather to be the pulpit than the stage. Of course the attractions of the theatre are manifold, but when I think of the added good to humanity which Dr. Blair might do had he the power of Mr. Garrick, I regret that the great actor should not have chosen the Church for the exhibition of his talents."

Mrs. Darby had scarcely time to concur in the speaker's sentiments before they were subjected to the criticism of her daughter.

“ Were you to confine the exercise of eloquence, sir, to the pulpit, the tragedies of our great writers would never find a hearing. Would that be no loss to humanity ? ”

Mr. Wayman hastened (with Mrs. Darby’s permission) to communicate her daughter’s intention of adopting the stage career. Reluctantly his friend turned, to face the young lady who had been so swift to demur to his opinions.

“ My words were not intended as a personal challenge,” he had the courage to stammer. He would have liked to add that the very fact just communicated to him put new strength into his conviction, but his self-assurance bent before the bright glance in Mary’s eyes, and he was sensible of a debt to Mr. Wayman for the ready tact with which he now assumed the helm of the debate. When they had dined they strolled in the Park. The young husband and wife were inseparable, the stranger walked by the side of Mrs. Darby, and Mr. Wayman began a lively discourse on “ King Lear ” with Mary. So the afternoon wore into evening, and when the ladies again took their places in the carriage, it was proposed and accepted that this agreeable expedition should be repeated before long.

On the journey back to London Mr. Wayman spoke warmly of the many good qualities of his friend. His health had recently been a source of some anxiety, he said, and it was at the doctor’s advice that he had decided to remain a few days at Greenwich for the benefit of the air. Mrs. Darby’s antipathy to the young man had melted before the geniality of his presence, and if she had greeted him with a look of

hauteur when on their arrival he had opened the door of the carriage, she had known how to efface the effects of her sternness by a smile as he closed the door and bade them a ceremonious farewell. She was accustomed to change her impressions of people rapidly, and felt, all the more from Mr. Wayman's account of his virtues, that she had done this young man an injustice.

“Tom has but one fault,” said Wayman at the end of his panegyric (and here he smiled with some humour at Mary),—“he is distracted with his admiration for a certain young lady. And were I his age,” he added in an outburst of candour, “my judgment might well be no cooler than his.”

“You have little reason as yet to be oppressed with the weight of your age,” said Mrs. Darby. But Mr. Wayman only sighed.

“Sometimes I cannot help envying Tom,” he said. “Youth is a precious gift if we only use it wisely. And this young man has everything yet to hope from life. He has the ability to be an ornament to his profession without enduring the necessity of amassing money. Rich uncles, they say, only die and leave their fortunes to their nephews in the pages of fiction. But here is a nephew who will probably inherit as much as thirty thousand pounds from an uncle who already shows his generosity by giving him a handsome allowance. Prospects like these are apt to shake the composure of the poor. And yet Mr. Goldsmith's village preacher counted himself passing rich with forty pounds a year! Do you remember the poem?”

Of course Mary remembered the poem. Its sentiments had inspired her own when at an absurdly early

age she had already composed her “Thoughts on Retirement.” One may be quite sure that she had already availed herself of every poetic advantage in the change of circumstances brought about by her father’s experiments in America ; and Goldsmith’s sentimental invectives against luxury had provided the girl with a spiritual luxury which helped her to regard the sudden fall in their style of living with a kind of melancholy satisfaction. But poverty with a Darby was at the most an acquired taste, and with Mary, the maker of verses, it received a kind of literary patronage which in no way deterred her from indulging a taste for luxuries whenever the circumstances permitted. Mr. Goldsmith would have lost patience if he could have seen the exquisitely dressed young lady (the very opposite of that simplicity which he extolled) declaiming his lines with all the airs and more than all the graces of the deepest conviction ; and she said the lines so beautifully that Mr. Wayman forgot about Tom and listened with rapture, bidding her remember more and more as the carriage neared the metropolis.

A few days later Tom presented himself at York Buildings, Villars Street, the new lodging to which the Darbys had removed. Finding Mrs. Darby alone, he took the opportunity of acquainting her with the state of his affections, preferring the open expression of his feelings, even at the cost of some embarrassment, to what he termed “the ignominy of clandestine intrigue.” Mrs. Darby expressed her gratitude for his sincerity ; at the same time she could give him no assurance as to the possibilities of success in his suit.

“I could not hope for any such assurance, Madam,”

said Tom. "All I ask is leave to prove the extent of my devotion. Miss Darby's superior merits should make her difficult in the choice of a husband. What right have I, a stranger, to lay claim to that great distinction? I beg you will not mention the subject of our conversation to her. Let an active but silent devotion plead my cause."

A sudden misfortune to the Darbys provided the lover with an opportunity of making his words good. The increase of smallpox in the second half of the eighteenth century had discredited the value of inoculation in the popular mind. More than fifty years had passed since Lady Mary Wortley Montagu had introduced the Turkish custom into England, and while its services were identified with the decrease in the disease observed at the beginning of its adoption, the same services were now held to be responsible for an undeniable increase. The science of the matter was but imperfectly understood. Mrs. Darby, influenced by the fashionable notions of the period, had not allowed her children to be inoculated. They were now to pay the penalty of her ill-judgment.

Little George Darby was the first to be stricken with the disease. His mother adored the little fellow, and was distracted at the possible consequences of her folly. The child was, indeed, dangerously ill, and in the confusion brought about by the disaster it was thought advisable to postpone Mary's appearance on the stage until the darkness of the domestic horizon had lifted. All the good in Tom's nature was challenged to the surface by the melancholy occasion. His heart was touched no less by the anxious sorrow of the mother than by the sufferings

of the child ; and while few people ventured even to call and inquire after the patient's progress and most of the Darbys' acquaintance avoided the house altogether, Tom fearlessly entered upon a thousand services, conferring with the doctor, arranging the pillows of the patient, visiting the apothecary, consoling the mother. Night and day he was in and out of the house. His presence animated the drooping spirits of the ladies, his advice (and they frequently turned for advice to him as the only man besides the doctor to whom they could appeal) was always prudent, and no amount of running hither and thither could fatigue him.

It was in ministering to the comfort of Mary that he found the greatest difficulty. At the beginning of her brother's illness she had been sullen and discontented ; her own plans were disturbed ; she was unable to realise the mortal nature of the danger to which his life was being exposed ; Tom's frequent presence irritated her. But as the disease progressed to its climax, she forgot her own troubles in those of her mother. One child (whom Mary had never known) had been killed by smallpox. Was death going to claim another member of her family through the same disease ? Death. She had read of it, written of it, acted it to herself, but never before been face to face with the reality as it now threatened to present itself. The death of her little brother William in Bristol had come and gone so rapidly that she had not had time to dwell upon it apart from the other calamities in which that period of her life was involved. And she was younger then and had been kept out of the sick-room. Tom

advised a similar course in the present instance, but to this she would not consent ; and Mrs. Darby was too distracted to insist upon anything. Mary's voluntary exposure of herself to the dangers of infection was indeed responsible for some of the zeal with which Tom cast all regard for his personal safety to the winds. In doing so he exhibited a power of self-sacrifice worthy of a son in a similar stress of circumstance. Had she paused to reflect, in the midst of her distress, upon his actions, Mrs. Darby would not have shrunk from recognition of the title to be called son-in-law which he was winning for himself. But Mary's opinion of his zeal, as he well knew, must be different. He felt acutely not only humiliation in the thought that she might regard him as officious, but a sympathy as generous as it was helpless in the resentment which she might reasonably feel at the way in which misfortune had equipped him with a weapon for piercing her heart.

One day when he entered the room unexpectedly, he found her in tears. The doctor had spoken gravely of her little brother's condition.

“Oh, what would I not give,” cried he, “for the power to stop those tears !”

She turned from his outstretched hand and fled from the room. His air of dejection did not escape Mrs. Darby's observation when they met. He had brought her an elegantly bound copy of Hervey's “Meditations,” and, as he handed the book to her, expressed the hope that it might help to beguile her through some of the weary hours.

“How untiring is your kindness,” she said, as she took the volume. “But you expend too much energy

on our behalf. 'Tis unwise so to tax your strength, especially after your recent illness. I fear my girl is sometimes ungracious. But believe me her heart is good. Of late she has been more petulant than I have ever known her. She is young, and unequal to the strain of this anxiety. Have you not noted how pale she looks these last days?"

Tom had noted the circumstance. To note in silence every passing mood in the girl when he was in her company was his sole recompense for his assiduity, but he could gather no hope from her attitude towards him. As a rule she was coldly polite, and sometimes she made neat speeches of gratitude, but the involuntary recognition for which he sighed never betrayed itself in a look or a word. Would that stubborn little heart never melt? When her brother was at last pronounced out of danger, he hoped that their joint rejoicing might bring him within reach of her compassion. But the paleness never left her cheeks. Soon she began to complain of pains. What both Tom and Mrs. Darby suspected, neither dared utter, until the unhappy truth could no longer be evaded: Mary was sickening for the smallpox.

Mrs. Darby was frantic; she accused herself again and again for not insisting on Mary's taking Tom's advice and avoiding the sick-room. Now it was too late. All the anxiety had to be experienced again, and who could foretell the consequences? Tom's composure broke down. At the sight of Mrs. Darby's grief he felt the tears rising in his eyes.

"If 'twas ordained that there should be another victim, why could not I have been chosen in her place?" cried the lover.

“ ‘Tis a sin to criticise the decrees of Providence,” Mrs. Darby replied. “ And yet ‘tis almost more than I can bear.”

While they were talking, Mary lay upstairs thinking. Of what? Of her mother’s fresh consternation? Of her lover’s despair? Of the possibilities of a woful disfigurement with which she was menaced? Of none of these things. She was crying at the thought that maybe she would never play Cordelia to Mr. Garrick’s Lear. All the hours spent in perfecting herself in her lines were perhaps wasted. Never would she gaze from the stage upon that sea of faces rising in gradual ascent from the pit. How often had she imagined to herself the ecstasies of that evening, the glitter of the company, the growing tempest of their applause. There was not a father in that audience but she would wring his heart; and she saw herself at the close of the performance summoned before the curtain, leaning breathless on the arm of Mr. Garrick and bending before the storm of public acclamation. And now all was to prove an empty dream. She was in bed, in the bed of her own house, smitten with a deadly disease. Downstairs were her mother and that man. Her head began to sing and her temples to throb. Suddenly she beats the pillows and borrowing the lines from Lear, in the confusion of her brain, cries out :

A plague upon you, murderers, traitors all!
I might have saved her; now she’s gone for ever!

The others rush upstairs, alarmed by the sounds that have broken upon their ears, and soothe the delirious girl with a cordial left by the doctor.

VI

Now that Mary was at the mercy of a perilous and perhaps fatal malady, her mother began again to reflect on the future of her daughter. Little George's illness had scared away all thought of anything but his sufferings and the longing for his recovery. But with Mary's recovery (and she dared not contemplate the terrible alternative) the whole advisability of her pursuing her theatrical ambitions would once more come into question. She knew that the girl's purpose was as firm as ever ; nothing could shake that. Nothing ? Suppose some larger influence, something to change the whole tenour of her life, were to supersede this infatuation for the stage. It was devoutly to be wished. Her health would never bear the strain of so arduous a profession. She thought of Tom with compassion.

Poor Tom ! Was all that devotion to be in vain ? Yet she herself had dismissed a lover who longed only for the opportunity to prove himself equally deserving. Dearly had she paid that independence of spirit in obedience to which she had set aside the wishes of her parents in the matter of her own marriage. And they had been explicit enough in telling their daughter what they judged to be for her good. Was it not her duty to be equally explicit to Mary ? Hitherto she had refrained from all express advocacy of the lover's cause. She knew that Mary would urge her

youth as an excuse for pushing into the background any proposition of matrimony. But the argument lost strength in the light of the offers which had already been made ; and there had been little of the child, artless as her conduct had been, in her manner of regarding them. In fact neither in her talents nor in her personal appearance was she like other girls of her age, and Mrs. Darby was fully aware of the dangers as well as of the privileges inherent in the distinction.

Fortunately the smallpox attacked Mary less violently than her brother, and many weeks had not passed before her mother determined to open the subject nearest her heart. By this time she felt the necessity for showing the faithful Tom at least some personal recognition for his untiring kindness ; every hour improved her own impression of his merits. His chivalrous manner, the soundness of his taste in literature, his acquaintance with the best society and his frequently reiterated disapproval of the vices which disfigured it, were powerful recommendations. Some pity for his orphaned life was mingled with the pleasure which she experienced in his company. She was sensible that a more brilliant union would better have satisfied her husband's vanity, but she felt no compunction when she imagined to herself Captain Darby's comment on hearing of the marriage : "The goddaughter of Chancellor Northington might have married a duke." Aye, but the dukes of the day did not confine their admiration of female beauty to proposals of marriage. Had not the Duke of Cumberland, the King's own brother, set a notoriously bad example ?

But while she was satisfied of the wisdom of her advice, she prepared herself to encounter many difficulties in attempting to make it acceptable to her daughter. On several occasions when she had broached the topic, Mary had put her off; now pleading the privilege of convalescence to choose its own subjects of conversation; now disarming her mother's intentions by a desire to be read to; and again, expressing the hope that if, with God's aid, she recovered, she might never be separated from her dear mamma. At last Mrs. Darby, seeing that Mary would never voluntarily direct her thoughts to the subject, commanded her to give it her attention with all the gravity of which she was capable.

"I have something very serious to discuss with you," said she one afternoon, as she entered the room and took a seat by the bedside. "You are now sufficiently recovered to listen to what I say without flutters. You must know that Tom's affections are deeply engaged. That he has endeared himself to us all by his devotion to our interests in this time of trouble, I need not tell you. But I can no longer take advantage of his goodness unless you will consent to look upon his suit with favour."

"Oh, Madam," cried Mary, "why should you regard him as more serious in his profession of passion for me than the others? When he sees the scars upon my face left by this illness, will he not take to his heels?"

"You wrong him," said Mrs. Darby quickly. "He is the kindest, the best of mortals. Your illness has but increased his affection for you, nor is there reason to suppose," she added weakly, "from the lightness

of the attack that it will leave the disfigurements of which you speak. God forbid that my child should bear such an affliction ! But what reason have you for refusing even to hear his addresses."

"I do not love him," said Mary simply.

"You love some other."

"I have no other ambition at present than to get well and obey Mr. Garrick's commands."

"Ah, Mr. Garrick, Mr. Garrick !" cried Mrs. Darby with an impatient ring in her voice, "your head has been turned by Mr. Garrick and his theatre. Perhaps some libertine actor has already enslaved your affections. I had hoped my love for you would at the least have earned your confidence." And she began to cry.

"If I have wronged Tom, it is now you who wrong me," Mary answered coldly. "I have not deserved your censure."

But Mrs. Darby went on crying ; it was so hard to be a mother ; she feared her child might think from what she had said that she wished to be rid of her ; how far from the truth would be the cruel supposition. But Tom's melancholy face haunted her ; she had not encouraged him to hope ; neither had she shut the door upon his amiable services. How could she ? Was she not alone in the world ? His conduct had shown the greatest delicacy. Every day disclosed a fresh solicitude for their welfare. "I know not what I should have done without him," said Mrs. Darby.

"And I know not what I should do with him," says Mary, at which her mother cries again and complains of her flippancy. By the end of the con-

versation one would have thought that Mary was the parent and her mother the child ; for Mrs. Darby needed soothing, and Mary humoured her by pretending that she would think over the matter, adding a playful warning to her mother to beware lest she herself should lose her heart to the melancholy Tom.

As soon as she was delivered of Mrs. Darby's presence Mary caused her box of manuscripts to be brought to her, and hunted out a poem in which she had ventured on the description of an ideal husband imagined in moments of solitary inspiration. As she read the lines she smiled at the correctness and the nicety of the youth depicted. Her mother would have every reason to be satisfied if she could only guess the contents of this poem. Would Tom correspond to the description ? Was he "firm in friendship, fond in love, free from flattery, pride, and folly "? She enjoyed the novelty of thinking of the shadowy poem and the substantial man together ; the process, by lending reality to her conception of herself as a creature of high literary gifts, flattered her vanity, and the edge of her ridicule for Tom was turned aside by the subtle influence shed upon the mere man from her own poetic effusion. Yet she was far from anything like acquiescence in her mother's wishes. Only she toyed with the notion as she might have done with some new-fangled ribbon from the milliner's, holding it up this way and that in the light to see a variety of colour effects.

Mrs. Darby soon realised that her advice alone did little to advance Tom's chances, and Mary was glad enough to consent to receive the lover, provided it was intimated to him that the permission was granted

out of sisterly gratitude for brotherly services. Anything was better than these sermons of her mother's. The tedium of lying on a couch would be agreeably relieved by a lover's rhapsodies, and when they in their turn became wearisome she could always arrest them by reminding him of the terms on which he had been admitted to her presence. Tom's face beamed when the good news was conveyed to him. Mrs. Darby begged that he would control his emotions. Another week would complete her daughter's recovery ; too much excitement might retard it ; she could trust him to observe the utmost circumspection.

Mary never forgot Tom's entrance. She had been reading and had put the book down to ponder a line, when he appeared in the frame of the doorway. The neatness of his costume struck her no less than its splendour. He stood on tiptoe as if fearful to steal unawares upon her slumbers. For a moment she played with her impression of him before dismissing it by an invitation to enter. His manner was gentle, almost paternally tender. He could hardly express the satisfaction which he felt on being privileged to see her in so advanced a state of recovery. Advancing towards the window, he offered to adjust the blind so as to preclude the admission of an intemperate light.

“ You are afraid to look upon my face for fear of seeing the scars there,” she said.

He made no reply, and stood gazing upon the road below with the cord in his hand. Nearly a minute passed in silence. Then he drew the cord with quiet deliberation as tight as it would go, admitting to the full the cold brilliance of a noonday sun in mid-winter. Mary started, and he turned.

“Ten thousand scars could not rob that face of its beauty,” he said in a whisper, as if talking to himself.

Who had broken the compact at the start? What lover would have been slow to take advantage of her impulsive coquetry? Tom’s interview lifted him to heights of aspiration and plunged him into valleys of humiliation. She let him talk as he pleased, frequently gave him her hand to kiss and called for her maid in the same moment. Her vivacity grew with his discomfiture. Only one thing she refused to discuss, and that was her marriage. Tom followed panting in the wake of her assiduous levity. His presence seemed to feed her theatrical passion. By her conduct she landed him in artificial situations from which he had not the art to extricate himself. So long as her address as an actress could force upon him an actor’s powers of dissimulation in their relations to each other, she was content; but whenever the mere man, with his inevitable cry for capitulation on an express date, dared to force himself upon her notice, she was off. She did not use her age as an argument against marriage when she talked with Tom. To do so would have been to deprive herself of the dignity which an assumption of equality with him in this respect conferred upon her. She intrenched herself behind more specious arguments, such as that domestic happiness could not exist where there was not a warm and powerful union of soul in the persons; and the admitted fact that she liked Tom was in itself an indication that she could never love him. “ ‘Tis the pinnacle of unwisdom,” sighed Tom. “What has love to do with reason?” laughed Mary. But when-

ever Tom left her, the idea of becoming his wife gained ground on her. In his presence she felt secure enough ; out of it she experienced a sense of isolation. Mrs. Darby said no more, but something in her very silence seemed to warn her that her mother would resign herself to the separation which her daughter's marriage would involve. The thought stirred Mary's affection for her mother to its depths.

“What have I done that you should want me to go from you ?” she exclaimed.

Mrs. Darby took refuge at once in tears. “My child, my child,” said she, “I do not wish it. But Tom has begged me to sacrifice my independence by living with you when you are married. I cannot say how deeply grateful I feel for this new evidence of his affection. But it is for you to decide.”

“Can this be possible ?” cried Mary in a voice of mingled astonishment and delight. “Can Tom be generous enough to let us live on together as of old ?”

Mrs. Darby checked her.

“Not as of old,” she said. “There will come changes enough.”

“But our love for each other cannot change !”

“God grant it,” said Mrs. Darby solemnly.

Tom smiled when he left the house that evening. Mary's consent had been given : not without conditions, but one of these had been of his own suggestion. Mrs. Darby was to continue to form part of the household. The other puzzled him. “She must have been filling her head with some romantic nonsense from the poets,” he reflected, “and 'tis true she is but a child.” They were to live as brother and sister after the marriage ; until when, she would

not say : as a brother he had come into the house of sickness, as a son he had shown himself to her mother. So the peaceful life was to continue. It was a picture of artificial ideals entirely after her heart. The idea of impersonating a wife, so far from frightening her, beguiled her fancy ; and in this way she was not obliged to relinquish the terms on which she had consented to receive his addresses. A few months only had passed since her fifteenth birthday. Except for her precocious interest in literature and the stage, she was a child indeed in her occupations. Tom had laughed when he had found her one day dressing a doll to help while away the hours of convalescence. He himself looked but a few years older than she was. And he was impatient to push forward the ceremony.

The banns were published on three successive Sundays at St. Martin's Church. At each reading Mary felt a flutter of excitement as the parson paused to give any objector time to make himself heard. But no voice was raised, and her readiness to figure in a dramatic episode subsided. After much discussion the date of the marriage was fixed for the twelfth of April, and on the morning after all the preliminaries had been duly arranged Tom paid the Darbys an early visit. He had several matters of importance to communicate to them.

VII

HIS greeting to the ladies betrayed agitation. "I have a request to prefer which may appear singular," he said. They bade him be seated, but as if he had not heard the invitation he paced up and down the room. Mary noted that his dress was somewhat disordered.

"You must know," he continued, "that until I come of age I am subject to the control of my uncle. His generosity makes me reluctant to speak harshly of him, but he is of the choleric temperament, and unfortunately he has already formed plans for my marriage. Hitherto I have refrained from openly disapproving these plans. To do so now would be to court his displeasure with all the consequences. 'Tis for this reason that I am driven to request that for a time at least our union should be kept secret."

Mrs. Darby at once suggested that she should visit Mr. Harris (for this was the name of Tom's uncle) and attempt to soothe the irritation which he might naturally be expected to feel on such an occasion.

"I myself have thought of this," answered Tom. "Indeed it is but one of the many courses I have turned over in my mind since leaving you last night. But my uncle lives in Wales, and the prospect of several days' journey, with little promise of a satisfactory interview at the end of it, will not allow me to entertain the idea. No, his heart is set on my union with

Julia, and he waits but the expiration of my articles with Messrs. Vernon and Elderton to celebrate our marriage."

"And Julia?" said Mary quietly.

"Has fortune, but no favour," said Tom, casting a rapid glance at the girl. "Oh, why had I not the courage to declare that I could never enter into this union? But my uncle, who has always lived and prospered in the narrow pursuits of trade, lacks (how I grieve to say it!) the finer sensibilities of nature. With him it is the purse, not the heart, which should decide the most solemn issue in a man's life."

"And the lady—this Julia," cried Mary impatiently, "is she to be left out of these considerations? Is your love for me but a transferred affection? Were you satisfied with the fortune until the face presented itself? Perhaps when the parson has joined us you will begin to regret the step you have taken. No, no, 'tis idle to argue with me," she continued with rising indignation. "Let this marriage wait until you are the arbiter of your own destiny. What need for this feverish hurry?"

"But the banns, the banns, child!" interposed Mrs. Darby.

"The banns do not marry us, Madam," said Mary, and flung from the room.

The next few days were all confusion. Mrs. Darby could do nothing with her daughter. Tom was refused admittance to her presence. Mr. Wayman, who had been informed of the engagement, was now made acquainted with the necessity for keeping it a secret. He expressed his regret at the circumstances,

and his confidence that when once Mary was Tom's bride she would melt the uncle's heart. "I do not know Mr. Harris," said he, "but sterner hearts than his have yielded to less bright influence than shines out of your daughter's eyes."

In the meanwhile Mary remained obdurate, nursing her resentment in the privacy of her room. Why had not this Julia risen in church when the banns were read? She pictured the whole scene: the startled look in the parson's eye; Julia's pale face and tragic mien; the stretched necks of the congregation and Tom blushing scarlet. It seemed to her that wherever Julia might be, it was but right she should be acquainted with her lover's perfidy. For had he not consented to appear to her in the light of a lover? In pursuit of this idea she began thinking of how to frame a letter to Julia, and to her mother's dismay the pen was in her hand and the opening sentence had been written when Mrs. Darby once more sought to bring her daughter to reason. Mary sullenly allowed her mother to peer over her shoulder, and the disconsolate lady read the words: "Madam, circumstances have arisen which make it highly expedient that I should acquaint you——"

"Still brooding over Tom's folly," she said gently.

"I cannot marry him."

"Child, child, you will not disgrace us! You cannot do it; your honour is pledged."

"How now? My honour! Is he ashamed to marry me? And if not ashamed, why does he ask for secrecy? I can spare him his shame. I do not love him."

"Undutiful girl. How often must I remind you

of your father's warning. Will you never learn to put a curb on your caprices? Would to Heaven the libertine captain had never come in your way. For I see that he still occupies your mind, and you grasp at every chance to postpone a marriage which all are agreed is for your welfare. As for this girl who has with so little propriety allowed her name to be associated with Tom's on so slender an excuse, she will soon dispose of her wealth and her affections elsewhere. Come, let me go down to Tom and tell him all is adjusted. . . . What? Still unforgiving? Take care, Miss Darby, your husband never has reason to blame a graver offence in the wife than she is asked to overlook in the lover. But I have done. 'Tis not for the parent to beg the child."

Mrs. Darby swept past her daughter and disappeared down the stairs, once more to tell Tom that her mission had failed.

"Indeed my daughter has good cause to be disaffected," she said, and she was almost as vehement in her condemnation of Tom's conduct as she had been a minute ago of her daughter's obstinacy. The whole affair was most provoking. A wedding was not a thing that could be fixed or unfixed at every turn of the wind like a weathercock. Many preparations had to be made even for the quietest ceremony imaginable. Mary would have to change her habit from that of the child to that of the woman. It was imperative to see a milliner without delay; yet she was loth to summon a woman so long as her girl remained in this tiresome frame of mind. She gave no serious consideration to Mary's suggestion that the wedding should be postponed. Such a course

seemed to the superstitious woman full of forebodings, and the thought of losing Tom altogether stirred into fresh activity all her old misgivings as to what might become of her daughter. There was no denying that she was giddy, and could a mother hope to find another son-in-law as accommodating as Tom ?

To add further confusion to the situation Mr. Garrick now wrote to obtain allowance to fix the night of Mary's appearance at Drury Lane Theatre. His letter expressed some impatience at the delays to which he had been subjected ; the dramatic career must not be regarded in the light of a recreation ; it was a serious profession requiring the exercise of as much self-denial as the profession of Mr. Cox himself, if success was to be obtained. Mrs. Darby showed the letter to Tom. "The stage will be her ruin," said he. "But what are we to do ?" cried Mrs. Darby. Tom would have liked to withhold the letter from Mary altogether, but dared not suggest a course that might appear treacherous ; and Mrs. Darby, who could not be stern for long without wishing again to be gentle to her daughter, carried the letter upstairs to Mary.

She paused opposite the door. The sound of Mary's voice reached her in a low wail where she stood. Was the girl ill ? Why did she moan thus ? In a moment Mrs. Darby had flung the door wide open upon a scene of strange disorder. Scarcely one piece of furniture was in its accustomed place. In an empty space opposite a row of empty chairs, behind which a large mirror had been dragged into position, Mary was kneeling, her loosened hair flowing over her shoulders. With outstretched hand she was beseeching some

imaginary figure on the mimic stage, and her eyes were fixed upon her own reflection in the looking-glass. The accidental discovery of her daughter's unconcerned enjoyment of theatricals at a time when she might have been expected to dwell upon the solemnity of her approaching marriage disconcerted Mrs. Darby even more than the steadiness of Mary's refusal to see Tom. As for the latter, the mother was not guilty of a desire to please at the expense of accuracy when she told Tom that the longer he was kept out, the more complete would be the reconciliation when at last he should be admitted. But in the presence of Mary's guileless adherence to the cherished ambition of appearing as Cordelia, with the ill-timed letter of Mr. Garrick in her hand Mrs. Darby was entirely at a loss how to proceed.

She was about to withdraw with the contents of the letter uncommunicated, but Mary had seen her and in a moment was by her side. Putting her arm in her mother's she led her to a chair. Mrs. Darby still held the letter in her hand, grasping it with a determination all the greater for the indecision of purpose with which she was beset.

"You have something to tell me," said Mary, casting a rapid glance of curiosity at the letter, and then: "Your hand trembles, mamma. What has happened?"

"Shall I speak to you, undutiful child? How long will you torture me with your whims? I have a mind to answer this letter without consulting you, for you do not deserve my confidence. To be acting; thus within a few weeks of your marriage——"

"Oh this marriage!" Mary interrupted impatiently.

"Will not one time do as well as another? You cannot wish it yourself. Tom has bewitched you with his fine manners."

"Listen to me," said Mrs. Darby, and the unfamiliar note of passion in her voice commanded her daughter's silence. "This letter is from Mr. Garrick." Mary's face brightened. "To *me*," continued Mrs. Darby, with dramatic emphasis on the pronoun. "He asks my permission to fix a date for your appearance. That permission he will never have—never, never! If you disobey my wishes, you leave the house never to return. I will not be the tool of your disobedience. Neither will I thwart you in your purpose. If you care not for the honour of your family, look to your own. Go and seek from Mrs. Garrick the protection as a mother which I can no longer give you. But take care—take care what you do!"

Before Mary could recover from her surprise at so unwonted an ebullition of temper, Mrs. Darby was gone from the room. The girl began to hum the catch from a popular ballad as she walked deliberately about the room. Her mother's fiery speech had inspired her with those very thoughts of complete rebellion which it had been designed to stifle. Why should she not indeed escape from all these complications to the protection of the Garricks? She imagined herself stealing out towards dusk, hailing a hackney coach, and driving to Adelphi Terrace; and she imagined Tom's consternation at the discovery the next morning when they came to wake her and found the empty bed. But when she tried to picture to herself Mr. Garrick's reception of her, the pinions of her fancy drooped and she fell again to earth from the con-

templated heaven of that escapade. Had she not heard the actor condemn just such a flight in another young lady, and condemn it too with no reserve of sympathy, as unmannerly and tending to degrade the theatrical profession? Something warned Mary that she could expect no favour from Mrs. Garrick unless it were shared by her husband. She began to cry with vexation at the cruelty of her fate.

“Why do you persecute me thus?” cried the unhappy girl, as at the sound of footsteps she turned to see Tom in the doorway.

“To save you from yourself,” replied Tom without advancing a step. Mary laughed.

“A pretty service! But what you call the perilous glare of the stage frightens me less than the dark secrecy of a clandestine union. What right have you to impose this condition?”

“Have you made no conditions?”

Mary stamped her foot with rage at her inability to make any satisfactory answer to his question. The anger in her eyes was a banquet for his to feast upon.

“Mary, you will not persist in ridiculing the custom of the Church, the prayers of your mother?”

“And yours?” was her mischievous answer.

He kneeled at her feet, imploring her to put an end to his distress. If she would not consider the consequences to herself, would she not reflect for a moment on the consequence to him of her unreason, if it were persisted in? She had the curiosity rather than the grace to bid him dwell more particularly on the supposed consequence.

“You will kill in me all belief in the good and

the pure. Vice will beckon me with crooked finger. My heart, my conscience, will be cold as a stone. All the pleasures of the moment will be like beacons to light me along the paths of darkness. See, Mary, you hold the life of a man in your power. 'Tis yours to ruin or to make beautiful. You have pledged your word. Can you hesitate?"

The force of his eloquent pleading struck home. She herself did not understand wherein lay the strength of his appeal. Hitherto he had been the patient lover, wearying her by his indefatigable activity on behalf of her mother no less than of herself. Now passion was investing him with more heroic proportions, compelling from him the utterance of words which would have sounded well enough in some fervid drama of which she was fitted by nature (or at least she thought so) to be the heroine. She had thought of romance as an enchanted garden veiled except at intervals from the vision of all men and women except actors and actresses. Each night the curtain lifted upon some wondrous corner in that garden for the delight of the spectators in the theatre, but each night at the close of the performance the same curtain fell, shutting out the glamour from all but those on the stage. Now as she stood facing her lover, with the disorder of the mimic stage which she had improvised all about her, it was as if the large air of Drury Lane stage had escaped into her own little chamber. The mysterious barrier between public ambition and private life had disappeared. It was with the sense of this novel discovery full upon her, the dark inkling that she was acting an absorbing part in the drama of her own life, that she now spoke.

"When the twelfth of April is once passed, and you still unwedded, you will go back to Julia."

"Never!" cried Tom, starting to his feet. "I would sooner forego all claim to my uncle's fortune."

"When he hears of our marriage Mr. Harris will in any case disinherit you."

"And that thought deters you?"

"Ungenerous!" cried Mary, striving to keep the tears out of her voice.

"Ah, let him disinherit me of his money," said Tom bitterly. "He cannot disinherit me of your goodness and your beauty. I ask no fairer portion in life than to work for you. I can think of no crueler fate than to live without you in idleness. Prudence and love make an ill match. Let us cast prudence to the winds and tell my uncle of our engagement."

With the air of a sovereign offering pardon to a prisoner she extended her hand, withdrawing it as swiftly as he would permit from a grasp that bespoke the conqueror rather than the captive. Then she followed him slowly down the stairs to where Mrs. Darby sat anxiously awaiting the issue of their colloquy. The sound of Mary's footsteps would have been enough without Tom's beaming countenance to reassure her. To her surprise her daughter was not in the least agitated; indeed she spoke as calmly now of the arrangements to be made, as she had but a little while before of her resolution not to marry Tom until he was of age.

There were now only a few weeks before the ceremony, and the milliner paid daily her visit to the ladies in York Buildings. The woman smiled at the capricious love of simplicity in the young lady's taste,



From an engraving by J. Condé, after a miniature
by R. Cosway.

MARY ROBINSON.

but Mrs. Darby insisted on her carrying out Mary's instructions with the minutest exactitude. Her marriage dress was designed to reproduce the habit of a Quaker, partly because the girl preserved a romantic impression of the Quaker ladies whom she had seen in Bristol, chiefly because the grown-up habit of the Quaker formed a less violent change from the girlish habit which she had worn until now, than the modish costumes of the day preferred by the milliner ; and its flowing simplicity flattered the beauty of a face that would have reflected ridicule on anything like elaborate embellishment. Tom's attire on his marriage day was a perfect mixture of sobriety and magnificence. He chose a maroon coat of rich quality and sombre hue. Everything in his costume pointed the nicety of his taste and the characteristic neatness of his person, from the buckles on his shoes to the powder on his head.

When she entered St. Martin's Church the dimness of the interior and the hollow resonance of her footsteps on the flags took Mary's thoughts back to the Minster at Bristol and the brass eagle under which she loved to sit as a little child. The emptiness of the church (for with the removal of secrecy as a condition Mary had no longer protested against it) added the solemnity of unbroken silence to the intervals between the proceedings. Dr. Saunders, the venerable vicar of the church, performed the ceremony ; the clerk officiated as father, and Mrs. Darby and the woman who opened the pews were the only witnesses to the union. A frigid composure distinguished every look, every act of Mary on this occasion. Mrs. Darby's tears fell silently and continuously. As Mary

knelt at the altar she experienced no emotions of hope, or sorrow, or fear. She was sensible of the cold in her knees, and that was all. As she spoke the marriage vow her fancy wandered involuntarily to Mr. Garrick and that glorious entry upon the stage which she had consented to forego. At the conclusion of the ceremony the vicar looked tenderly at Mary and declared that he had never before performed the office for so young a bride. From the church Mrs. Darby, with her son-in-law and her married daughter, proceeded to the house of a friend where an elaborate breakfast had been prepared for them. Thence they set out for the inn at Maidenhead Bridge, being joined at the moment of departure by an intimate school-friend of Tom's, who had not been informed of the marriage, but regarded Tom in the light of a favoured suitor.

“Miss Darby is dressed like a bride,” observed this facetious young man as he helped Mrs. Darby to mount the postchaise and took his seat beside her. Tom and Mary travelled in a phaeton. After the breakfast she had changed her Quaker's habit for a dress of white muslin, over which she wore a white sarsnet scarf-cloak. On her head was a chip hat adorned with a profusion of white ribbons, and as she sprang lightly into her high seat Tom's friend glanced mischievously at the girl's dainty foot clad in a white satin slipper in which the glint of silver embroidery shone as it was touched by the rays of the April sun. Mary overheard the remark of her husband's friend, and blushed. She looked quite as pretty as Mr. Cosway's miniature painting of her which you may still see hanging on a screen in the Garrick Club.

During the whole of that day she was wrapped in impenetrable melancholy and scarce heeded the jocund speeches of the young husband, so splendid in his maroon coat and silver buttons, at her side. In the evening, as she strolled with her mother in the garden opposite the inn, she burst into tears and declared herself the unhappiest of mortals, and Mrs. Darby had much ado to soothe her into a more tranquil state of mind. She had renounced the stage as a career and acted herself into a loveless marriage. Such is the true version of the way in which Mary Darby became Mrs. Robinson on the twelfth of April seventeen hundred and seventy-four.

VIII

MR. HARRIS was close upon seventy when Tom married. His brother Howell Harris, the principal founder of Welsh Calvinistic Methodism, the friend of Whitefield and the zealous Selina Countess of Huntingdon, had died only a year before. Ten years earlier another brother had died after a career as singular as it was distinguished. Originally a working blacksmith he had made his way to London, became an authoritative writer on scientific subjects, and besides winning the post of Assay Master at the Mint, had composed an essay on Money and Coins which remains to this day a valuable contribution to the literature of an obscure subject. Thomas, of whom Mary's husband always spoke as uncle, was the eldest of the three brothers. He had turned his activities into the tortuous channels of commerce, and, having amassed a considerable fortune, was now playing the squire at Tregunter, his newly acquired estate in the county of Breconshire. Tregunter was handsomely situated at a few miles' distance from Trevecca, where the Countess of Huntingdon with the aid of the late Howell had established her training college for ministers either of the Church of England or of any other Protestant denomination.

While the "business" member of the family carefully avoided taking any share in the obloquy

with which his brother had been loaded in his lifetime, he had no objection to sunning himself in the light reflected from the halo of the "martyr" now that he was dead. Not that Mr. Harris ever thought of turning Methodist; and when Trevecca was opened in 1768 his position as Sheriff of Breconshire had not increased his sympathy in his wild brother's mission. But now all this was past history. Brickbats were no longer flying at the reformer's head, and it was easy to be tolerant. He had always known how to reconcile his principles with his interests, and there were some who still remembered the story of how Tom Harris had laid the foundation of that fortune which he now loved to display wherever it could serve to gild the edges of a rough nature and an illiberal education.

In his youth he had been apprenticed in London to his uncle, who was a master tailor. Perceiving the advantages to be gained from an acquaintance with a party of well-to-do drunkards who were engaged in window-smashing in the neighbourhood in which he lived, young Tom Harris (now succeeded to the business) boldly joined the audacious crew and helped them to demolish his own windows. "I know the master of this house," said he, while the spirits of the party were at their highest—"a jolly fellow who keeps an excellent bottle of wine in his cellar. Let us compel him to produce it." The invitation was responded to with alacrity. Harris produced the wine, bidding the company start drinking while he used all his eloquence to persuade the owner to join the carousal. When he had allowed time enough to elapse for the merry gentlemen to realise that he had not boasted idly of the merits of the wine,

he reappeared, and amid general laughter disclosed himself as the host. The joke was admirably suited to the company, and the guests were well pleased, after so diverting an entertainment, to order their suits from Mr. Harris. He had learnt his trade well ; his coats were well cut and well sewn. Soon he acquired a reputation as a fashionable tailor, and to keep himself on the crest of the wave he paid frequent visits to Paris to perfect himself in the mysteries of dandyism. The bold ruse by which he had ingratiated himself with a party of influential drunkards led to his obtaining contracts for supplying the Army with clothes. He was as proud of his cunning as he was careful never to mention this conspicuous instance of its exercise.

But he was known in London and, in spite of his undeniable success, suspected in Wales. As justice of the peace he fined the rustics whenever he heard them swear, but in the retirement of his family circle he could scarcely make an observation without the accompaniment of an oath. It was pretty widely known that the terms “nephew” and “niece” applied to young Mr. Robinson and his sister, who resided with Mr. Harris, were titles of courtesy. Spiteful people whispered that their mother had once been Mr. Harris’s laundrywoman ; and the theory was plausible enough, to judge from the clumsy stature and the snub nose (to say nothing of the ruddy complexion) of Tom Robinson’s sister, a sour young lady who had joined the Huntingdonian sect and spent much time at Trevecca. Betsy Robinson disliked her brother for the superior airs which he gave himself, and she was heartily glad when he went to London to be articled to

Messrs. Vernon and Elderton. She disliked Julia also, the young lady Mr. Harris intended Tom should marry. It was one of the few points on which she and her brother were agreed. But she disapproved Tom's cowardice in allowing their father to assume his consent to the match. A few months would now bring matters to a head, for Tom was near the end of his articles. What would happen? Mr. Harris had a violent temper. Tom, while he had resided under his roof, had been frequently the cause of scenes that had set the whole household trembling. He was lazy, arrogant, critical of his father's manners. Mrs. Molly, the governess of the domestic department on the estate, who dined at the table with Mr. Harris, did not help to soften the father's irritation in the presence of his son. Every one in the household felt relieved by Tom's absence in London, and his occasional visits to Wales in vacation were borne with all the more fortitude for the certainty of their short duration. When Tom had written to declare his intention of spending his summer holiday near London, no one felt sorry; but when at the beginning of August Mr. Harris had received another letter announcing his son's speedy arrival on a matter of importance, Miss Betsy scented danger, Mrs. Molly looked crosser than ever, and "the Squire" made them both as uncomfortable as he could by hinting at mischief for which he would know how to take vengeance on the young scoundrel. The topic of conversation shifted from the particulars of the family mansion now in course of construction to the vexed question of what Tom had been doing and what would be the upshot of the disclosures he had to make.

Tom and the Darbys returned to London ten days after the marriage. Tom continued to live at the house of his lawyers in Southampton Buildings. Mrs. Darby and Mary were installed in a large house in Great Queen Street, Lincoln's Inn Fields, built on a site adjoining that on which now stands the Freemason's Tavern. They had hired it from Mrs. Worlidge, a friend of Mrs. Darby's and the third wife of the late artist, who had had almost as many children as he had painted pictures ; at least, such was the witticism of the friends who helped him to eat, drink, and swear away his life. Inigo Jones had designed that house, and Kneller and Reynolds had lived in it before Worlidge. Their pictures still hung on its walls, and the beauty no less than the luxury of their new surroundings delighted the mother and her young married daughter. Yet as the weeks went by and Tom still evaded the publication of his marriage, Mrs. Darby's suspicions began to be aroused. This was a strange young husband who could bear to live with such composure away from his bride. Nor was she contented with Tom's explanation that it was Mary's own wish. One day when she had left her daughter at a friend's house, she walked in obedience to a sudden impulse to Tom's chambers. She thought she had noted a change in the way in which Mary spoke of Tom. Her mind was made up. Concealment was no longer necessary, no longer desirable. Her daughter's reputation was at stake. Tom must inform his uncle at once.

“ Unless you are guilty of some gross deception,” said she, “ you can have no reason for maintaining the secrecy. If you are acting in obedience to the wishes of some other woman——”

Tom stopped her. His obvious confusion on her sudden appearance had added strength to her fears and fire to her words. Perceiving himself to be in a situation in which the truth was at last the best excuse to be found for his conduct, Tom confessed that Mr. Harris was—not his uncle, but (he grieved to say it) his father. At the same time he contrived to awaken a certain pity in his hearer for the victim of circumstances which could not fail to humiliate one compelled in so rude a manner to reveal them. But Mrs. Darby was none the less relentless in her insistence on the marriage being publicly recognised and Mr. Harris being informed of it. If Mr. Wayman were right in his anticipation of Mary's influence over the irascible old gentleman, all might yet be well. Reluctantly she consented to permit Tom the choice of his own time and opportunity for disclosing the secret of his parentage to his wife, and it was arranged that Mrs. Darby would accompany the young people as far as Bristol, and that thence they should set out for Wales without any loss of time.

On their arrival in Bristol, Tom, foreseeing an advantage to be gained by preparing Mr. Harris for the news, left Mary and her mother to pay visits to their friends and enjoy the solace of renewing old associations. He himself set out for Tregunter. His heart sank at the prospect of this interview; but it was no longer to be avoided.

As he rode towards midnight through the thick wood surrounding the estate, his thoughts were indeed as black as the shadows from the trees in his path. The moon was high, and the mountains, appearing at intervals to the solitary traveller as he came on a

clearing, awakened no sense either of homeliness or grandeur in him. He was deeply in debt, and his father knew it. How would Mr. Harris take the news of his marriage? He imagined a stormy scene of mutual recriminations, and then saw himself in the road, an outcast without promise of support. When he reached the cottage in which the family were lodged during the building of the mansion, all was silent—all dark, but for the light burning in the parlour on the ground floor. Tom dismounted and pulled timorously at the bell. The door opened, and he was confronted with his father.

“A fine time to arrive in the country,” said the justice of the peace, motioning Tom to the stable door where he could dispose of his horse. “These are your London hours, I suppose.”

Tom said nothing, but when he had lodged the horse he entered the cottage and followed his father into the parlour. He half expected to see Mrs. Molly there scowling at him in her unfriendly fashion, but he was relieved to find that the others had all retired.

“Well,” said Mr. Harris, “what now?”

Hungry, thirsty, weary with the fatigue of his long journey, Tom sank into a chair.

“Had we not better postpone our conversation till the morning?” he said.

Mr. Harris was at once indignant: did Tom think he had waited up for the pleasure of once more looking on his foppish countenance? What he had to tell could as well be said now as at another time.

“Well then, sir,” said Tom desperately, “I cannot marry Miss Julia, for I love another.”

"Love, love, love!" retorted Mr. Harris with a coarse attempt at ridiculing Tom's mincing speech. "Is that all you have travelled to tell me? A man cannot live on love. Have you thought of that?"

Tom was silent, and Mr. Harris ran a finger slowly along the gold edge of his scarlet waistcoat, as if he were cautiously feeling the stitches.

"I hope the object of your choice is not too young," he said more affably, "for a young wife cannot mend a man's fortune."

"She is nearly seventeen," said Tom uneasily.

Mr. Harris grunted.

"I hope she is not handsome," he continued. "Rich she cannot be, for you could not fall in love" (and again the note of ridicule resounded in the substantive) "with a rich girl. But beauty without money is a dangerous sort of portion. Julia could have set you on your legs, and she is a sensible woman, whereas this girl, I will wager, has the head of a butterfly. A pox on the women!"

Tom leaped from his chair.

"You shall not abuse her," cried he, with clenched fist and the anger darting from his eyes. Mr. Harris laughed.

"Gently, gently, young man, 'tis too early to take umbrage. When you are married it will be time for your hand to fly to your sword."

Tom's arm dropped to his side.

"She is my wife," he said, trembling with suppressed fury.

Mr. Harris looked up from where he sat and cast a peculiarly keen glance at his son from under his bushy eyebrows.

“Ho, ho,” he whispered softly to himself, and then began to hum an air from the “Beggar’s Opera.” He rose and walked about the parlour, while Tom stood with his arms folded, waiting for the expected outburst. Suddenly his father wheeled round and faced his son at a few paces distant.

“Where is she?” cried he in a voice of thunder.

“In Bristol with her mother,” said Tom meekly. “I wanted to bring her—here.”

“Well,” said his father, assuming his most judicial manner, “what is done cannot be undone. If she is a gentlewoman, I will not refuse to see her. You may fetch her when you please.” Then, without appearing to have noticed Tom’s thanks, and with his eyes staring in front of him as if at some object in his own past which had risen unbidden to his memory, he walked heavily from the parlour. Tom heard his footsteps overhead and waited until all was still before he went up to bed, still hungry, but relieved that the dreaded strain of the interview was over.

The next morning he wrote to Mary requesting her to prepare for the journey to Tregunter, and announcing his intention of returning to fetch her within a few days. He also bade her write to Mr. King, the money broker in Goodman’s Fields, who would forward her a sum to cover the expense of all necessary purchases; his uncle, he said, seemed disposed to act handsomely. Mrs. Darby rejoiced at the news conveyed in her daughter’s letter. She had every hope that the natural relation in which her son-in-law stood to Mr. Harris would operate beneficially for both the young people. An uncle might

well have found it possible to refuse a service at a critical moment in his nephew's life, but, however stern he might be towards other people, a father was naturally soft towards a son ; even the error which was the origin of this son's being was evidence of a human weakness that argued favourably for Tom and Mary's chances. So Mrs. Darby took comfort from where she could. People in Bristol were glad to see her again, and curiosity in the circumstances of Mary's marriage added cordiality to the welcome which was extended to the mother and daughter in their visits.

Of course Mary insisted on going to the Minster House, and was agreeably depressed at the decay into which it had fallen ; the mouldering walk, the shattered nursery windows, provided her with food for those melancholy reflections which she liked to think exhibited her soul in its true character. She did not look forward to her presentation at Tregunter, and she could not understand why Tom had made her apply to the money broker. Were his affairs already so involved that he could not provide her with a few guineas without borrowing them ? She began to wish that she had given Tom less excuse for his reticence by her own silence during the first few weeks of their marriage. But even now, after she had been a wife nearly four months, she was under sixteen, and with all the misfortunes of the Darby ladies they had never been obliged to have recourse to people like Mr. King to help them through their difficulties ; though what the Captain may have done was another matter. Mrs. Darby spoke lightly enough of Tom's embarrassments to her daughter ;

she feared he had been indiscreet, had perhaps unduly exceeded his allowance on the strength of his expectations, but with care and the help of Mr. Harris all would soon be put into good order.

Tom returned in high spirits ; he was certain when his uncle saw Mary every shade of resentment would disappear. "Your smile," said he, "would melt the stone walls of the Methodist seminary itself." Mary laughed as he kissed her. Occasionally in his mirthful sallies Tom reminded her of her father. The wind was high when they took leave of Mrs. Darby, and Mary looked pale at the thought of a rough crossing in an open boat to Chepstow. But Tom raised her spirits by letting loose his own. He was both tender and cheerful, and Mrs. Darby noted with satisfaction the care with which he wrapped a shawl round her before she stepped into the boat. The tide was high and the night was boisterous. "At least he loves her," mused Mrs. Darby, as she made her way through a crowd of sailors on the quay, after bidding them farewell. She felt very lonely. Her thoughts wandered to the son she had left in London, for it had been arranged that he was to lodge at his sister's house. She wondered how her eldest son was faring in Leghorn. Her heart ached for the two children she had lost. Now Mary was gone. The scene of that departure, the smell of the sea and the tumble of the waves, forced her memory, reluctant as it was, back to the day on which Captain Darby had taken ship for America. Had she only summoned up courage to accompany him, how different all might have been ! Her tears fell fast as she trudged wearily in the direction of the winking lights of Bristol town.

IX

THE fatigue of a long journey and the novelty of the scenery through which she passed helped to diminish Mary's apprehensions as to how she would be received at Tregunter. She was glad to exchange the tossing of the boat on that tempestuous night for the jolting of the stage coach. The passengers to Chepstow had been numerous, and the unfamiliarity of the experience assumed the aspect of a nightmare as she had turned from the drawn faces of men and women to look at the terrified drove of oxen at the other end of the boat. She was almost grateful when at last she came within sight of the Harris estate. Tom had entreated her to overlook any harshness in his uncle's manners and she had consented to conceal her age, a flattering precaution to one so young, and harmless enough in view of her husband's description of his wife to Mr. Harris before her arrival.

The early morning air warmed by a generous sun, the smell of the earth, the twittering of the birds, and the cool rushing of mountain streams were infinitely refreshing to the girl as she drove with her husband at her side through the tranquil forest. Her face wore that air of pensive melancholy subsequently immortalised by Mr. Gainsborough in his picture, when the postboy stopped at the stately mansion of

Tregunter. Mr. Harris immediately came out from the adjoining cottage. The warmth of his embrace left no doubt as to the favourable nature of the impression she had made upon him. At the same time she was sensible of having awakened very different feelings in her husband's sister, who appeared behind Mr. Harris on the threshold. Each of the young ladies had taken in the costume of the other in the rapid glance peculiar to women on such occasions. It would indeed have been difficult to find a sharper contrast than that provided by Miss Betsy's gaudy chintz gown and thrice-bordered cap and Mary's claret-coloured riding habit and white beaver hat, from which the white feathers nodded bravely in the breeze. On being duly presented to her sister-in-law by Tom, Miss Betsy with an air at once patronising and frigid took her by the hand and led her into the house. Mrs. Molly's pinched face seemed to suffer a twinge of added sharpness as she was confronted with the elegant young lady, and poor Mary felt that the ladies had prejudged her, and that it would be difficult for them even to preserve an appearance of cordiality. Mr. Harris made matters worse by apologising for the rough simplicity of the household.

“We have no style up here,” said he, gazing with impertinent admiration at his daughter-in-law. “But I knew the town before Tom, and made many a waistcoat for the quality, and I know a fine face when I see one, Mrs. Robinson.”

Mrs. Molly thought fit to change the course of the conversation by inquiring for particulars of the journey, and while Tom was satisfying her, a servant entered

to ask where he should dispose the boxes of the young couple. This necessitated an adjournment to the little entrance hall of the cottage, and Mr. Harris insisted on coming too. He laughed heartily at the wry faces of Mrs. Molly and Miss Betsy when they saw four boxes of unwieldy dimensions.

“That’s right,” cried he. “I’m glad to see you encourage the milliners in their trade. As for Tom, he was always fond of finery. Zounds, but the neighbours will stare when they see so many fine clothes.”

It took two servants to handle the boxes, and the stairs creaked under the weight as they struggled up them. Mrs. Molly shouted her commands from below as if she were a general reviewing troops ; but as she ignored the geographical difficulties under which the servants laboured, it was impossible to carry out her instructions. Miss Betsy shrugged her shoulders and looked reproachfully at Tom, as much as to insinuate that he at least might have had more consideration than to dislocate the household arrangements so unnecessarily. Neither of the ladies paid the slightest attention to Mary, who blushed and excused herself again and again as she turned to her husband and cried, “Oh, Tom, why did you not tell me?” But Mr. Harris held his sides and laughed throughout the whole of the operations.

“ ’Tis a pity the mansion is not yet finished,” cried he. “There will be room and to spare when it is up. This cottage is a poor hole. But you must come again later, Mrs. Robinson, when Molly has had time to prepare for you,” and then he burst into a fresh fit of laughter as the boxes fell with a crash upon the upper landing.

Mrs. Molly was furious.

"This minx is already turning the Squire's head," she observed in a whisper to Miss Betsy. "Take care that she does not ogle her way into his fortune; she has the face to do it."

Mary soon realised that the difficulties of her position were none the less great for coming from so unexpected a quarter. The bitterness of the ladies and the cordiality of Mr. Harris deepened in measures of almost mathematical equality. There were moments in the course of those three weeks when Mary almost preferred the scorn of the females to the coarse admiration of "the Squire." But she was as powerless to silence the one as she was innocent of any deliberate intentions of awakening the other. Tom's air of easy indifference to the humiliations inflicted upon her was a source of pain to Mary and of exasperation to Miss Betsy, who frequently reminded her brother of his duty to look after his young wife. "Public opinion here will not permit Mary to be so constantly abroad with Mr. Harris without drawing undesirable conclusions from the fact," said she. But Tom only smiled. Was it for him to question the propriety of his wife's conduct? So Mary found herself obliged to ride and even to drink ale with "the Squire," and it was the drollest sight imaginable to see the portly old gentleman, in his brown fustian coat and gold-laced hat, riding a small Welch pony with the beautiful young lady in her fashionable habit mounted on a grey mare at his side. At first Miss Betsy followed them on horseback, with a woollen petticoat drawn over the skirt of her dress to guard against rain, and a high-crowned bonnet on her head; but she grew tired of the superior attention

commanded by Mary whenever they chanced upon an acquaintance, and Mr. Harris took no pains to conceal his irritation at his daughter's presence. Rather than force her company any longer upon them to so little purpose, she took solace in secret conversation with Mrs. Molly on her father's delinquencies ; and the two women would watch the departure of "the Squire" and his daughter-in-law from an upper window in the cottage and indulge their ill-feeling in many a contemptuous observation.

In the evening Mr. Harris always asked Mary to sing and play to him, and the sweetness of her voice and the amiability with which she complied with his request were constant sources of envy to the other women.

" You have sung the Squire to sleep," observed Mrs. Molly with malicious satisfaction one evening, when in fact the effects of more ale than usual had outweighed the animating influence of his Mary's music. Mary glanced from the harpsichord to the massive figure of Mr. Harris whose head had fallen forward upon his breast in an attitude at once solemn and comical. She rose from the instrument and asked leave to retire ; but the opportunity was too valuable for Mrs. Molly to miss, and she answered with some asperity :

" Is the company of your husband's sister—to say nothing of myself—obnoxious to you, Mrs. Robinson, that you should be so eager to withdraw from it ? "

" I was afraid my presence might disturb the freedom of your conversation," Mary answered. Miss Betsy tittered.

" We do not pretend," continued Mrs. Molly,

“either to dress or to talk in the latest London fashion. Neither Miss Robinson nor myself place an exaggerated value upon the ornamental aspects of society.”

Mary would have liked to add, “nor upon the common civilities of life,” but she preferred to hold her peace ; and she was right in assuming that such a course was far more embarrassing to her ill-natured critics than any remarks she could have made. The strain of the situation was made all the more painful for the sleeping presence of Mr. Harris, and it was as much as Mary could do to refrain from laughing outright as it became more and more obvious in the silence of the room that “the Squire” was snoring.

“You will excuse my frankness, Mrs. Robinson,” said Miss Betsy at last, “but the accidental nearness of our relationship makes me reluctant to permit any misunderstanding between us which a tactful exhibition of candour can clear up. I feel it my duty then to inform you that the style of your dress appears to me, and I believe also to Mrs. Molly” (here the other lady bowed), “highly inappropriate. A lawyer’s wife has no right to dress like a duchess. You may indeed be very accomplished, but here we look first to the merits or deficiencies of the housewife ; and a good housewife, you will agree, has less occasion for harpsichords and books than persons more idly occupied. Of course you are young, and it is for Tom to form the character of his wife. But perhaps you are willing to take a hint.”

If this was a hint, Mary wondered what her sister-in-law would regard as plain speaking. “I always imagined,” said she simply, “that such matters were the concern of the private person.”

"Quite true," said Mrs. Molly with the air of one making a generous concession. "But when a young woman is married she ceases to be a private person in the sense you indicate. If she has a private fortune, as is often the case, she may still exercise her private taste with some show of reason. In the present instance, however, the circumstances are entirely different, and circumstances must always be allowed to alter cases."

Mary flushed under the coolness of the insult. "Nay, but, Madam——" she cried, rising suddenly from the chair in which she had seated herself in deference to their wish that she should not withdraw. At the noise made by the moving of her chair, Mr. Harris began to stir.

"Were my husband present——" cried Mary hotly.

"What's the matter, Mary?" shouted Mr. Harris, blinking and stretching his limbs with ugly freedom. "Is Molly teasing you?" Then starting to his feet, "Damn me if you shall say a word against her, either of you," cried he in the voice that made them quake. "Mary's perfect: she's too good for Tom. I would have liked her for my own wife if she had not married the young rascal. Go on playing, Mary my dear, and never mind what they say. They don't count for much, either of them."

But Mary begged to be excused and hastily fled from the room, leaving the terrified Molly and Miss Betsy to the mercy of Mr. Harris in one of his formidable outbursts of temper.

When Tom entered his wife's room that night, he found her crying. He had been out fishing all day and had supped with the rest of the fishing party, so

that he had not reached the cottage until the household had retired. Mary told him what had happened, and begged him to make arrangements for their speedy departure. No good could be effected by prolonging the visit ; the jealousy of the ladies, which had already carried their behaviour far outside the bounds of decorum, was likely to increase. So long as she stayed they would attempt to poison the mind of Mr. Harris against "the interloper." Tom saw the wisdom of her counsels, praised her for her patience, and the next morning announced that business summoned him to Bristol, and that he could not postpone his departure for more than a few days. Mrs. Molly and Miss Betsy found it difficult to conceal their satisfaction at the news. Mr. Harris laughingly suggested Tom should leave his wife at Tregunter, and, content with the vexation inflicted upon the ladies by his remark, said no more.

The morning of departure dawned upon a scene of much confusion in Mary's room. Mrs. Molly had offered to help pack the boxes, but the proposal had been politely declined. The carriage was ordered for noon, and Mary occupied all her time in getting her things into order. Mr. Harris, Mrs. Molly, and Miss Betsy once more stood in the hall as the boxes were lifted downstairs, and no comment was passed this time on their dimensions. Tom kissed his sister. Mary shook her hand coldly enough, and then in bidding a similar farewell to Mrs. Molly contrived to murmur a few words of thanks for the trouble taken to make her apartments comfortable during her stay. Mr. Harris embraced Tom, the door was opened, and Mary was about to submit to a kiss from her "uncle," when

to the consternation of the whole party Mr. Harris suddenly declared his intention of accompanying the young couple as far as Bristol.

“I will have your farewell kiss, Mary, and I will come too,” he cried, as he hugged her and took up his hat.

“But there are a thousand things awaiting your decision for the new mansion,” exclaimed Mrs. Molly.

“Let them wait,” cried he. “I have a mind to buy many things in Bristol. You shall help choose them,” he added turning to Mary, “for they are all for Tom and you when I am no more.”

Miss Betsy shed tears of vexation; if she had only known this was his intention she would have made preparations for accompanying him.

“But you cannot go yet, for your bag is not packed. You have no warm clothes for the crossing—think of the consequences to your health, sir.”

“Damn consequences! I will see this lady safe across the Channel!” cried Mr. Harris. “And damn me if I listen any more to all your talk! My mind is made up to go now, and go I will. You can send the bag after me. And take care you forget nothing.”

So saying he ran out and jumped into the carriage in which Mary had already taken her seat in her anxiety to escape as quickly as possible from the scene of contention in the hall. Tom jumped up beside the postboy, and the horses broke into a brisk trot. A turn in the road brought them again within sight of the cottage, and Mr. Harris laughed and waved his hat defiantly at the two women, who still stood where they had been left on the threshold of the door. From the vehemence of their gestures it was

evident that they were engaged in angry altercation. "I am heartily sick of their company," said the justice of the peace turning his hat round on his head, for in the excitement of departure he had put it on with the button on the wrong side. "And I am longing to make the acquaintance of Mrs. Darby," he added, smiling at Mary. Tom laughed immoderately ; and Mary, confused as she was by "the Squire's" sudden resolution, could not help experiencing satisfaction at the discomfiture of her female critics.

On their arrival in Bristol Mr. Harris was duly presented to Mrs. Darby, and so much rejoiced was she at the success of Mary's introduction, that she found it easy to overlook the roughness of his manners. He accompanied the ladies on many a visit to their friends, and was included in invitations to many dinner parties. It was generally remarked that Mr. Harris was unusually active for a man of his years, and when he sang and danced with Mary, the delight of the spectators at the gaiety of his spirits was expressed in huzzas of applause which stimulated him to fresh exertions. Mrs. Darby asked Tom if he did not feel jealous at the attention bestowed by Mr. Harris on his wife, but Tom was too happy to pay much heed to the question ; nor was Mrs. Darby serious when she asked it. Mr. Wayman, to whom she had from their first acquaintance taken a fancy, now appeared not only in the light of a friend but as a wise prophet. Did he not predict that all would go well when once Mr. Harris was confronted with Tom's wife ? The mother had been through a period of heavy anxiety, and was only too glad to repose in the security offered for the welfare of her

daughter in Mr. Harris's enthusiastic reception. He took Mary with him whenever he went in search of embellishments for Tregunter House. He made her select the marble chimney-pieces, and commissioned her to engage the services of an artist in London to decorate the walls. When the day came for his return to Wales he grew quite melancholy, wished he was Tom's age and had had Tom's luck ; and when at last, after waving a farewell at the party until the coach was almost out of sight, he put his head within the window, Mrs. Darby and Mary and Tom for a few minutes felt quite depressed at his departure.

How had Mary conquered him so completely? Was it by coaxing and wheedling? By clever machinations and artful speeches? Not at all. She had an instinctive aversion for what was uncouth. She disliked the company of Mr. Harris, but she would still more have disliked to give him even the smallest opportunity of guessing at her antipathy. Circumstances entailed upon her the necessity of being, for a time at least, much in his presence. Her own nature compelled her to exercise politeness even under much provocation. She had not wanted at all to visit Tregunter. Her composure during her stay there had attracted Mr. Harris and offended Mrs. Molly and Miss Betsy. By the art of doing nothing and looking a great deal she had crept into the old man's heart, and the discovery of having bivouac'd there puzzled herself no less than it delighted the others. Beauty such as this girl possessed cannot be turned on and off like a garden hose for the watering of a particular flower at the will of the owner. Occasionally it escapes on a marauding expedition of its own into strange regions

and brings back captives that the conqueror can recognise as the casual spoil of illegitimate warfare. So Mary's beauty had strayed, and the girl of scarce sixteen had innocently beguiled the old man of seventy into the subservience of a willing slave.

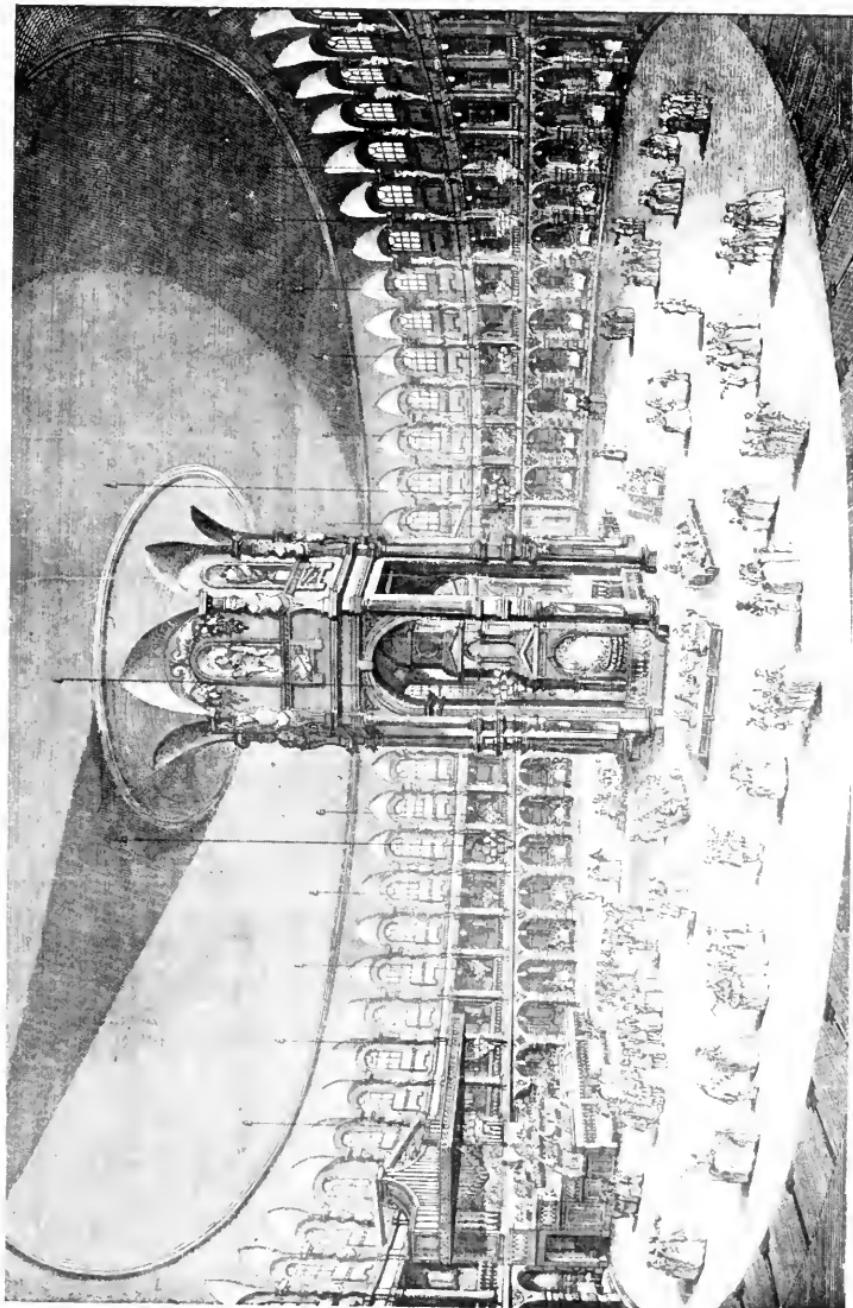
X

ON their return to London the Robinsons moved from the old house in Great Queen Street to No. 13, Hatton Garden, a modern building better suited for the domestic requirements and the fashionable life of the young couple. Tom had a pretty taste in furniture, and the house presented all the attractions of luxury tempered with elegance. A handsome phaeton was bought for Mary, and saddle horses for Tom. Mrs. Darby remained in Bristol, and Mary now made her public *début* in what she afterwards described as the “broad hemisphere of fashionable folly.”

Tom took his young wife to Ranelagh, bought a sprig of myrtle for her in the ante-room, and was highly delighted at the attention she aroused by the simplicity of her costume, for she still adhered to her Quaker style and wore close round cuffs instead of long ruffles and left her hair without powder. On the opening of the winter season at the Pantheon, Oxford Road, the Robinsons paid an early visit to this glittering scene of entertainment. Designed originally as a counterblast to the notorious assembly rooms of Mrs. Cornelys in Soho Square and opened in 1771, this Pantheon must not be confused with the Little Pantheon of Spa Fields. The two places of amusement were advertised respectively in the papers as the

Nobility's and the Mobility's ; but although the Little Pantheon was visited chiefly by journeymen tailors, hairdressers, milliners and servant maids, and the aristocracy patronised the statelier building, there was ground for supposing the division between Nobility and Mobility to represent a distinction without a difference in the troubled reign of good King George the Third.

Mary dressed with elaborate care for the Pantheon. Her love of clothes, as we have seen, was no artificial passion for utilising opportunities to attract the gaze of the curious. She liked to satisfy her own sense of beauty and propriety in whatever she wore, and the singularity of her costume was rather a sign of the courage which empowered her to pursue her own ideals than of an audacious impulse to fly in the face of accepted conventions. Large hoops and high feathers were then the fashion ; to have worn them would have been to extinguish the graces of the bird under its plumage. She preferred a habit of pale pink satin trimmed with broad sable and a suit of rich point lace, the gift of her mother, who herself had worn it in her younger days. Tom thought his wife an unconscionable time dressing on this occasion ; and so she was, for the knowledge that she was to become a mother increased the care which she bestowed upon her person. When they entered the Rotunda the girl thought herself in fairyland. The variegated lights reflected from the glazed dome, the music, the glitter of the company moving about pillars of mock *giallo antico* as if in the maze of some intricate and stately dance, the circular shape of the promenade—all helped to produce an effect of absorbing enchantment. Tom drew her attention to several



From a drawing and engraving by Bowles.

INSIDE VIEW OF THE ROTUNDA AT RANEAGH.

of the ladies—the beautiful Countess of Tyrconnel, Lady Townshend, and Lady Almeria Carpenter, with whom one of the King's married brothers was said to be deeply in love. After a tour round the Rotunda they took a seat on a sofa in an alcove in order to observe the passers-by with more leisure. On the opposite sofa a lady was engaging two young men in conversation. From where she sat Mary heard one ask the other, after a glance in her direction, "Who is she?" Tom had missed the observation ; his eyes roved restlessly amid the moving throng, and he rose at Mary's bidding and walked away from the neighbourhood of the strangers without guessing the motive of his wife's desire to take another turn round the building. As they walked, however, they were met by the young men from the opposite direction, and this time they both heard the question addressed to a third gentleman : "Who is that young lady in the pink dress trimmed with sable?" Tom smiled, but Mary frowned. She wished now she had put on hoop and powder, if she must pay for the singularity of her costume with the embarrassment which she felt at becoming a topic of curiosity to strangers. She was entreating her husband to take her home before the disconcerting experience was repeated, when the gentleman to whom the young men had so audibly addressed their question, advanced towards her, and with a bow of marked civility, "Miss Darby, or I am mistaken," said he.

Startled at being thus addressed, Mary looked coldly at the speaker and recognised Lord Northington.

"My name is now changed to that of Robinson," she said ; "this gentleman is my husband."

Lord Northington expressed apologies for his mistake, and delight at the circumstances which disclosed it to him. He continued to walk with Tom and Mary, and made many enquiries after Captain Darby. After a single turn round the room, he expressed the hope that he might be permitted to pay his respects to Mr. and Mrs. Robinson ; and on Tom's informing him of their place of abode, made a profound bow and took his leave of them, in time to join a group of ladies and gentlemen whose presence in the Rotunda he had just noticed.

Tom and Mary now entered the tea-room, but finding no vacant seats, returned to the Rotunda and seated themselves near the door, for the heat of the room made Mary feel vapourish. She would have liked to bid Tom fetch a cup of tea for her, but feared to be left alone ; and they had just decided to depart altogether when Lord Northington appeared with a cup of tea and at the same time presented the two strangers, his friends Lord Lyttelton and Captain Ayscough. As Mary said afterwards when they were driving home, “I was grateful for the tea, but could well have dispensed with the introductions.” But Tom called her unduly severe ; it must be counted rather as the misfortune than the fault of these gentlemen that she had overheard their persistent enquiries, but where was the harm in seeking a ceremonious presentation on the strength of an agreeable impression ? She had nothing to censure in Lord Northington’s behaviour, and could scarcely blame him for doing such a service for his friends. Mary did not pursue the argument, for she was too tired, but she had disliked the glances of Lord Lyttelton, who had stood by her while Tom went to seek the carriage.

The Captain had looked as if he grudged his companion the privilege of her proximity, for he could not approach her from the other side without taking up an awkward position in the doorway. Both had claimed rather than besought permission to visit her, with an easy effrontery which she had not known how to disconcert.

Tom was out when all three gentlemen paid their visit of ceremony on the following morning. Lord Lyttelton enquired with much solicitude after Mr. Robinson, and professed an earnest desire to cultivate his acquaintance. Mary felt a kindlier disposition towards Northington than towards the other two, who, she now learned, were cousins and had been school-fellows at Eton. They asked if she was acquainted with Mr. Fitzgerald, a contemporary of theirs at the same school, and on Mary replying in the negative,

“You must know him, Mrs. Robinson,” said Lyttelton.

“And beware of him,” said Northington with a chivalrous glance at Mary.

The others laughed.

“His success with the women is so universal, so terrific in its scale, that Juan himself would have feared him for a rival,” said Lyttelton. “But his company is nectar and ambrosia to wits like myself, and I am sure Mr. Robinson would find much in him to admire.”

Mary disliked the tone of Lyttelton’s conversation, and was glad when the visit came to an end. Tom was much entertained with her account of what had passed. He knew more about both Fitzgerald and Lyttelton than he cared or thought it prudent to

tell Mary. Had they not both figured in the famous Vauxhall dispute when Mrs. Hartley had been stared out of countenance by a party of Macaronies? This was the case that had disturbed Mrs. Darby when Mary was bent on becoming an actress; and in the exchange of public correspondence Fitzgerald had come out in an ugly light, for not only was it clear that he had championed an offence against manners, but in the fight which resulted he had instructed his footman to impersonate a captain with a wholly imaginary grievance, so that to the effrontery of the rake he had added the vices of the impostor.

“No Irishman ever bullied and swore more than fighting Fitz,” admitted Lyttelton to Tom when they fell upon the matter in conversation, “and yet with all his faults I love him. He is the most quarrelsome dog alive; no man is so forward to provoke a duel. His rage is an explosion. But as often as not it has no more meaning than the noise of the new fireworks at Vauxhall. They say he rarely faces his man in a duel without some cowardly artifice. Are swords the weapons? Fitz lines his waistcoat with elastic. Pistols? Down he drops on one knee as his adversary fires. And yet there is always good sport where he is. Garrick himself is not a better actor. 'Tis as good as any play to watch him in a brawl. When his blood is up his eyes look like oysters; but at a moment's notice the dog can conjure into them the melting ‘Madam-you-pierce-my-soul’ effect which no woman of sensibility can resist.”

Tom was quite willing to make the acquaintance of Lyttelton’s Irish friend, and he took a great liking for Lyttelton himself. This young man had inherited

some of the talents and none of the virtues of his father "the good" Lord Lyttelton, whose verses Mary used to sing when she was a child. The first baron had died barely a couple of years ago, but this event, which was publicly lamented, had not arrested his son's private course of profligacy. From the time when, although no more than a youth of nineteen, his engagement to General Warburton's daughter had been broken off on the discovery of the vicious life he had led in his travels in France and Italy, he had been a source of shame and trouble to his family. His literary taste and an engaging frankness in his address gave added prominence to his unblushing excesses, which were a source of universal condemnation. But his talents were hardly less notorious than his intrigues. It was known that he painted well and that Mrs. Montagu had stamped his work with the blue seal of her admiration. Shortly before his father's death he had married a widow, and it was thought that the wild youth had settled down; but he soon revived the memory of his earlier infamies by deserting the company of his wife for that of a barmaid. He had a town house in Hill Street, Berkeley Square, and a country seat at Hagley. Rank and a great fortune were now added to the possession of a handsome figure and lively parts. Tom thought himself very fortunate to have secured the intimacy of so influential and fascinating a personage, nor could Mary point to anything in his behaviour towards herself which merited any open expression of disapproval.

On her second visit to the Pantheon Lord Lyttelton acted as her *cavaliere servente* during the evening; but the major part of his attention was bestowed upon

Tom, and Mary felt almost vexed at the cool disdain of his manner towards her. He spoke to her as if she were a child, and confined his conversation to literary topics, as if he were amusing himself by an attempt to discover her tastes. During the concert he introduced her to Count Belgiojoso, whom a few years before the Empress Maria-Theresa had sent Ambassador to London. The Count was then in his forty-eighth year, had a large house in Portman Square, and was already famous for that love of gallantry which led him later to erect a little temple in the Park at Brussels and dedicate it to Venus. When he could engage Lyttelton in a few minutes' private conversation he asked him all about his fair little friend who looked so *pétillante* in her gown of white and silver. Mr. William Brereton of Drury Lane Theatre was also presented to Mary, a spirited youth with a wild look in his eye and an extravagant address that left no doubt of his profession.

About this time Mary felt renewed curiosity in her husband's financial condition. Mrs. Parry, wife of the reverend Doctor Parry, and the talented authoress of the novel "Eden Vale," had shown an anxious friendship for the young woman who moved so guilelessly in a circle as dangerous as it was fashionable. She seemed surprised that Mrs. Robinson should be so ill-informed of her husband's business concerns, and her surprise deepened into suspicion when Mary confessed to her that since their return to London her husband had been much away from her company, seldom attending to his profession, but making numerous excursions to Lord Lyttelton's seat at Hagley and frequently remaining out till the early hours of

the morning. This good woman would frequently spend the evening with Mary in Hatton Garden, and without pressing her advice unwisely she sought every occasion on which to urge her young companion to demand an explanation from her husband.

But Tom's replies gave his wife no satisfactory assurance when she taxed him with his repeated absences and with his indifference to the financial stability of their household. If she was lonely, he would see to it that there should be more company at Hatton Garden ; he had imagined in her present condition she would prefer a life of retirement ; as for their expenses, he was independent enough, and such matters were not a woman's concern. He did not question her on what she spent on her wardrobe, and he was indignant that she should stir up this irksome topic at all.

“ Lyttelton has promised to obtain for me a position of some importance—and that very shortly,” said he ; and under the plea of wishing to discuss the matter more frequently, he invited his friend more frequently to Hatton Garden. Parties were also made to his lordship's house in Hill Street, and here Mary met again the courtly Imperial Ambassador on whom she had made so lively an impression at the Pantheon.

In idle moments she began again to occupy herself with her poetry, receiving much encouragement from Mrs. Parry, whose sympathy was all the more acceptable for the tone of insolent superiority which crept into Lyttelton's voice whenever he spoke of Mary's literary gifts. He would call her “the child poetess” to her face, and irritate her still more by expressing the hope that she would forgive his little innocent sallies.

His talk was frequently licentious, and the erudition which he mixed with his wanton observations added audacity to a natural indifference to the sensibility of chaste minds.

“No woman under thirty,” said he once, with a mischievous glance at Mary, “is worth admiring. Even the antiquity of forty is far preferable to the insipidity of sixteen,” and then he quoted some lines from Horace at which Tom laughed.

One evening Tom brought a new friend to Hatton Garden, a light, wiry young man wearing very wide frills and ruffles and carrying a cane with an unusually large gold knob. An exuberant splendour distinguished his dress in every particular. He moved with a mixture of rapidity and ease. His manner was none the less impressive for its mobility. Lyttelton and Tom continued an animated discussion which they had entered upon before stepping into the room. As Mary rose to receive the stranger she was impressed with the involuntary deference in his look and in his bow. She had greeted Lord Lyttelton as superficially as the laws of civility permitted. Her interest in the newcomer had been awakened even before she had been made acquainted with his name. This was Mr. George Robert Fitzgerald. He was utterly different from what she had expected—strikingly different from Lord Lyttelton, who had expressed so warm an admiration for him. He spoke very little, and divided his attention with easy equality between Mary and Mrs. Parry. The presence of the other gentlemen had no power to disturb the serenity and the whole-heartedness of his devotion to the ladies. His eyes were remarkably expressive. To Mary

they appeared to shine with a manly and yet curiously tender light. His voice was musical, and his whole presence radiated a soft geniality in marked contrast with the boisterous hilarity of Lyttelton. Mrs. Parry herself admitted the charm of his personality afterwards to Mary—all the more readily because Mr. Fitzgerald had in the most delicate manner conveyed to her his appreciation of her literary talents, while Lord Lyttelton did not scruple by the arrogance of his address to conceal his poor opinion of the authoress of “Eden Vale.”

“There is a wide difference between these two men,” said she. “I cannot look at Lord Lyttelton’s unbashful forehead without a shudder of repugnance. Mr. Fitzgerald has indeed a terrible reputation. But I should say that his gallantry came from the heart, and the other’s from the head. Lyttelton is the handsomer, I grant you.”

Mary agreed with her friend. Mr. Fitzgerald had puzzled her. He seemed to divine the secret grief that was tugging at her heart for the shameless conduct of her husband. Once she had caught Mr. Fitzgerald looking at Lord Lyttelton with an air of sad reproach, as if betrayed by the natural goodness of his heart into naked pity at her defenceless situation. Tom’s absences grew more frequent. She knew that Lyttelton had introduced him at “Arthur’s,” and that he played high. Fortunately the luck until now seemed to be on his side; but she sighed when she thought of what might happen when the tide turned. There were times when she longed for the company of her mother and cried at the thought of what that mother must have suffered with a reticence into which her

own sorrows now forced her to penetrate with relentless certainty. Her brother George had returned to Bristol ; the delicate state of his health did not permit him any longer to live with the Robinsons in London. So Mary was alone, and the loneliness of her spirit was deepened by the outer brilliance and gaiety of her surroundings.

The change about to come into her life was but dimly intelligible to her. In the circle of Tom's acquaintances, birth had no meaning apart from rank or fortune, marriage was but an added incentive to infidelity, death was an impropriety rarely suffered to disfigure conversation. Between Mary's daily life and her innermost emotions an iron curtain had fallen, leaving her (like the spectator at a performance in which the ghost of himself is the central figure) condemned to take part in the plaudits of the audience ; as if, in her case, no more than the satisfaction of a passion for amusement were at stake. It was as natural for her to like "the music, the lamps, and the glare of Vauxhall," as to be pleased at the sight of a pretty costume. Dress and the pleasure-garden helped to keep the cup of her bitterness from overflowing. She grasped at them with an instinct as simple as that of some one catching at the rail of a staircase on which he has stumbled. To keep herself free from the futile pains of reflection, she now occupied all her spare time in composing verses, and was pleasantly engaged one morning in perfecting a pastoral when the servant abruptly announced Mr. Fitzgerald.

She received him with some embarrassment, apologising for the confusion of her table, which was

strewn with books and papers. Mr. Fitzgerald asked for permission to glance at her pastoral, and his face expressed appreciation as his eyes followed the neatly written lines. On laying down the paper he said many pretty things of her poetical gift. Then carelessly taking up a volume of Miss Aikin's poems, he began to read from them in his low musical voice. On coming to the conclusion of the poem he had selected, he shut the book, and, without glancing at Mary to note the effect of his eloquence, paused before replacing it on the table to admire the curious elegance of the binding.

“ ‘Twas the gift of Lord Lyttelton,” said Mary, by way of explanation.

At the name he started and changed colour. She felt at once that she had committed an indiscretion in telling him how she had come by the book.

“ Mrs. Robinson,” said he, “ I cannot help feeling the warmest interest for your welfare. I have no claim to press my advice upon you. If you would prefer not to hear it, I will withdraw. Yet I have the strongest reasons for begging you to listen.” He paused. She nodded a sad assent to his proceeding.

“ Lyttelton is my friend,” he went on, speaking in a slow, deliberate voice. “ Nor did I think that my honour would ever allow me to speak in disparagement of him. My heart is ready to burst when I think of the ill service he is doing you by his fatal influence over your husband.”

The tears were in Mary's eyes as she rose and walked to the window. But the passionate utterance of Fitzgerald pursued her, and the words fell from him now with increasing vehemence.

"I have committed many a sin, Madam. May God forgive me. But, by Heaven, I have never tried to seduce a husband from so innocent a wife."

"You forget," cried Mary through her tears, "that he is still my husband."

"Husband?" cried Fitzgerald; and again—"husband? Is he a husband who can neglect so adorable a creature, who is so base a judge of his own happiness as to fly from the highest to the lowest, from St. James's to St. Giles's? A few months' marriage, and this is to what a husband reduces you! Condemn the morals of the town if you will; but in our code of chivalry we at least have no place for such husbands. Oh, Madam," and his voice turned from indignation to pleading, "think of what this has cost me—to watch, day by day, the honour of one who fired me at first sight of her loveliness with the deepest devotion, dwindle and peak under the cowardly neglect of an unworthy husband. To know my own friend the abettor in this vile transaction; to feel the tongue tied until passion bursts the bonds of friendly prudence and casts me, as it does now, at your feet."

Tempestuously as the words had come, there was grace in his manner of kneeling to her now with outstretched hand. "Fly with me," he whispered faintly, "and let me preserve, till death itself, that innocence which another has not known how to treasure."

"What!" cries Mary, turning with blanched face from the window. Her tears were dry now, and her soul was in rebellion at the audacity of his declaration. "You would pretend to aid me in my distress, and you add another insult to what has already been heaped

upon me ! Leave me at once, I beg you, and let me forget this shame." Her voice quivered.

"Never," cries the lover, "until at least I have your forgiveness for what the depth of my feelings has wrested from me."

She looked at the stooping figure, and even in her anger was unable to evade the appeal, so gloriously condign, of his plea for pardon. "Go, go, I tell you !" she cried, in a voice half of command, half of entreaty. "If indeed your love is no masquerade, go quickly. No other way of proof is open to you." In an impulse of generosity she held out her hand with open palm, as if to seal the pact of her refusal of his advances by a handshake as between one man and another.

When she stood alone in the room, and had heard the house door close behind him, she stood mutely looking at the hand that he had covered with his kisses. Then she burst into tears. "I am alone, alone," she kept saying to herself, "God help me, I am alone."

XI

LORD LYTTELTON had repeatedly included Mary in his invitations to Hagley, his country seat; but the tone in which she declined each proposal left no hope in him that she would ultimately give her consent. She knew that Tom frequently accompanied his lordship in his excursions from the town, but she felt no wish to enquire how he passed his time on these occasions. At his house in Hill Street the parties were fashionable, but she could not deny the decorum with which they were conducted whenever she consented to accompany Tom; and the very freedom which Lyttelton took care to allow her, either to join in his parties or to stay away from them, without giving offence, set her pride in motion and made her eager to show that she lacked none of the ability to move easily in a society of which she disapproved. Even if she stayed at home, her privacy, as has been seen, was not secure from invasion. Lyttelton was pleased at her more frequent appearance at Hill Street, and showed his appreciation by dropping those allusions to her extreme youth which in the earlier stage of their acquaintance had been so frequently in his mouth. But he looked in vain for some sign that a nearer approach to her confidence would not meet with a rebuff. She was coldly polite, and that was all. He could not help feeling humiliated at the fact that he was the last

person of any at his parties to whom she would intentionally address her conversation. "A child she is," he reflected to himself; "a child in years, but a grown up she-devil in obstinacy." How to outwit the underlying prudence of that obstinacy was a problem which he was constantly turning over in his mind. He did not even pretend to himself that he was in love with her, and had she lent herself more readily to his artifices, might even have been willing to forego the amusement of adding her to his list of victims. But to be thwarted by a mere girl in the kind of experience in which he regarded himself as a master, hurt his pride and stimulated his ingenuity. He had done pretty much as he liked with the husband, and must be a poor hand at a contrivance if, in the long run, he could not do pretty much as he liked with the wife.

Moreover, Tom was beginning to bore him, and the discovery that the man was a tailor's son confirmed in Lyttelton the suspicion that his friend was more sensible than a gentleman should be of the advantages of consorting with the nobility. He had been vexed, too, at being dragged into a public defence of this Mr. Robinson, who had boldly taken a man before the magistrate Sir John Fielding on a charge of misappropriating money to his own use. Unfortunately the man appeared to be acquainted with all the *arcana* of Tom's business concerns, and began to make ugly allusions to letters of credit obtained by Mr. Robinson on false representation from Holland, and Ostend, and France. The magistrate began to prick up his ears and was all for detaining the prosecutor, until the situation had been saved by the timely interposition

of Lord Lyttelton, who swore to the fellow's malevolence and the considerable fortune of his friend, so that the accused was remanded for further examination. Thus the threatened revelations were temporarily silenced, and the sudden death of the accused before the case could be continued, removed the dangers of a complete exposure.

Libertine as he was, Lyttelton had scruples in money matters, and disliked to be associated with swindlers, nor did he care for openly proclaiming friendship with a man of mercantile pursuits. Robinson was not witty; if it was to turn out that he was not wealthy, his claims to a place in fashionable circles would be seriously impaired. His wife remained his most substantial asset, and Lyttelton cursed the husband for a fool with malicious zest when he realised how completely Tom had alienated Mary's affections, no less by the stupidity (so Lyttelton chose to view the matter) than by the depravity of his conduct. Matters had now reached a stage when Lyttelton saw that the friendship of the husband involved the enmity of the wife, and as it yielded but poor satisfaction in itself, he had no scruple in sacrificing it to what he deemed to be the needs of the situation.

Calling one forenoon, as was his almost daily custom, at Hatton Garden, he enquired if Mr. Robinson was at home, and receiving a reply in the negative, requested to speak with Mrs. Robinson on important business. As soon as he was shown into the room Mary perceived by the confusion of his manner that the motive of his visit was no ordinary one.

“The time has come,” said he, “to communicate to you a secret of great moment to your welfare.”

“Nothing, I trust, has befallen my husband,” said Mary quickly, Tom’s continued absence since the previous evening lending colour to the gravity of her anxious supposition. Lyttelton hesitated.

“How little does that husband deserve the solicitude of such a wife,” said he.

“If you have come to betray the confidence of your friend,” said Mary bitterly, “you might have spared yourself the trouble.”

“Mrs. Robinson, you have always chosen to misunderstand me,” Lyttelton replied, suddenly veering in his tactics. “Until now I have left you free to pursue your fancies as to my character and intentions. Now I no longer choose that you should do so. You will have the goodness to control your natural indignation and listen as calmly as you can to what I have to say.” His tone was deliberately commanding, and Mary’s curiosity was roused. She made no attempt to interrupt him as he continued :

“At the outset of my acquaintance with Tom I had an aversion for him no less decided than what you yourself had for me. You did not conceal your feelings, but it suited me to conceal mine. So deeply impressed was I with your innocence and your beauty that I, who thought myself free from any sentiment in such matters, found myself perpetually hoping that your husband was unlike other men of the world. I wanted to see in him the perfect lover. Experience argued strongly against the probability of the facts answering to my wish. It was in my power to test them by experiment. Your husband sought my acquaintance more eagerly than I sought his. Had he remained faithful to his wife under the temptations to

which I exposed him, he would have earned my undying friendship. But I regret to say that he has not denied himself a single amusement for his wife's sake. He is a person for whom I shall never feel anything but an inexhaustible contempt. Whatever he may have been when you were ill-fated enough to wed him, he is now utterly unfit for the society of his wife. If you repeat to him what I still have to tell you, I must fight him. I am better at the duel than he is, and I shall not show him an inch of mercy."

"What you say of my husband is false, utterly false," said Mary hoarsely. "He will know how to exact honourable reparation from you."

"Had he a spark of honour," replied the merciless Lyttelton, "he would not allow me to be talking at this hour, in this place, in this way to his wife."

His audacity staggered Mary.

"So far," continued he, "I have spoken generally. I have now to tell you that your husband is a ruined man. His debts are considerable. His affections at this moment are centred in Harriet Wilmot, an abandoned character who lives at No. 10, Princes Street, Soho. He visits her daily, and has spent large sums on her. When I think of the misery to which by his conduct he reduces one whose happiness ought to have been his first care, I, who have no exaggerated regard for the marriage vow, could weep at the insult offered to your sex. But this is no time to indulge such sentiments. If you are a woman of spirit you will be revenged. Leave your husband and place yourself in my protection. My fortune is at your disposal, and in every other way you may command my powers to serve you."

He stood quietly watching the effect of each sentence as he spoke. In the excitement under which she laboured, Mary had taken a volume from the table, and was crushing the sheets between her hands as she listened to his vile proposition. The beauty of those hands was made all the more articulate for the libertine as they busied themselves nervously in the work of destruction. But after a few moments of silence following upon his final words, the book flew across the room, the corners of the cover catching in his wig and scattering the powder in a cloud about his face. As it fell on the floor he recognised the mutilated copy of Miss Aikin's poems, which only a few weeks ago he had presented to Mrs. Robinson. At the same moment the face of the girl, maddened by despair and indignation, passed rapidly before his own, and before he could move a step to intercept her progress she was gone from the room. He heard a cupboard door bang in a neighbouring room, and then the patter of light feet in tempestuous hurry down the stairs. Moving to the window he saw her dart across the road and jump into a hackney coach ; nor, as he advanced to a mirror to adjust his wig, did he doubt to what address she had bidden the man drive. An angry look came into his eyes as he stooped to pick up the twisted volume and thrust it into his bosom. To leave about any evidence of the scene which had passed would have been imprudent. Tom might return at any moment, and he had no desire to be forced by the circumstances into a duel with a tailor's son. As he sauntered away slowly down Hatton Garden, he remembered that a party had been arranged for that evening to Drury Lane Theatre, and

afterwards to a select concert at Count Belgiojoso's. Would anything happen between now and six o'clock to prevent Mrs. Robinson taking her seat in the playhouse? He wondered.

From where she sat in the hackney coach, Mary noted the slatternly appearance of the servant-girl who opened the door of No. 10, Princes Street, and in reply to the coachman's enquiries, informed him that her mistress was out, but was expected to return in a very short time. She bid the coachman wait, and entered the house. The servant looked curiously at the visitor's stylish white lawn cloak bordered with lace as she conducted her to the drawing-room on the first floor, and then left her.

Now that Mary was about to face the proofs of her husband's infidelity in a way which allowed no quarter to her sensibility, she was surprised at her own composure. It was as if the circumstances added a new and strange consequence to her individuality. She had passed into a new world. The terrors of her passage across the Bristol Channel confused themselves in her mind with her present situation. She was made callous to the danger through the high wave of suspense on which she rode. The poverty of the surroundings increased her sense of desolation by the contrast it offered to the splendour of her own apartments. Opening a door at the end of the room, she saw a new white lustring sacque and petticoat lying on a bed. She tried to master the disorder of her reflections by forcing a sequence of events into her brain. She was the wife of the man with whom she had crossed the sea to Wales on that tempestuous night. Not only the wife, but now the outraged wife, the butt of

fashionable ridicule. Possibly fresh insult awaited her on the entrance of this woman. What interest could she be expected to feel in keeping a civil tongue? As Mary cast her eyes round the sordid bedroom, a loud knocking at the front door startled her. Quickly she re-entered the front room. In the doorway stood Harriet Wilmot.

"I came to enquire whether or not you are acquainted with a Mr. Robinson," said Mary, glancing at the other's black gauze cloak and the lilac ribbons in her chip hat.

In a manner at once sad and confused, Miss Wilmot bade her be seated.

Noting the paleness of her lips and the distress in her handsome eyes, "You have no cause for alarm, madam," said Mary; "I have something which I wish to convey to Mr. Robinson, and should feel obliged if you would favour me with his address."

As she pronounced her husband's name she recognised the strangeness in her own voice, and felt satisfied of its propriety in this connection.

"Mr. Robinson visits me frequently," replied Miss Wilmot. She drew off her gloves as she spoke, and as she passed a hand over her eyes, Mary observed on her finger a ring which she knew was Tom's. Miss Wilmot withdrew her hand quickly as she noted the circumstance.

"You are Mr. Robinson's wife," said she in a voice which trembled with sorrow and humiliation. "I am sure you are. Probably this ring was yours. I beg you to receive it. Could I have known that Mr. Robinson was the husband of such a woman——" She held the ring, which she had slipped from her

finger, towards her visitor in an attitude of supplication.

Mary rose, bowed coldly in spite of the confusion which overtook her, and departed. On reaching Hatton Garden she found Tom waiting dinner. He did not ask her whence she came, and she found no difficulty in assuming a tranquillity which she was far from feeling. The neatness of his dress which had previously commended itself to her taste struck her for the first time as ludicrous when she sat at the table with him, and she could hardly refrain from smiling at his habit of nibbling daintily at a piece of bread. Never before had he appeared to her in so comic a light. They talked agreeably of the play, the Pantheon, and the coming reception at the Imperial Ambassador's. Tom thought his wife more than usually sprightly in her conversation, and when she had dressed for Drury Lane paid her almost as many fine compliments on her beauty as when he had been engaged. At Drury Lane theatre Mary was quick to take an outer seat and to make Tom sit next to her, so as to avoid the possibility of having Lyttelton for her neighbour; but the precaution was wasted, for he did not make his appearance. The play was a failure. Mrs. Abington, whom Mary had recently met in the house of Mrs. Parry and thought the most bewitching woman she had ever seen, had entered on one of her interminable quarrels with Mr. Garrick and excused herself from appearing. For the first time Mary's attention wandered from the stage. The heat of the theatre gave her a violent headache, and to Tom's chagrin he was obliged to despatch a messenger to Portman Square with an apology for not keeping their engagement;

Mrs. Robinson was suffering from a feverish cold which necessitated her remaining within doors for some days.

When they reached Hatton Garden Tom showed some readiness to attend to his wife's wants, and reminded her that long ago he had proved his capacity for nursing. But Mary begged him to leave her, to go out where he pleased and not concern himself about her ; she needed only the offices of her maid. Tom offered to fetch the apothecary. "A pretty case for the apothecary!" cried Mary sharply, and Tom, putting her ill-humour down to her headache, shrugged his shoulders and left the house to spend the rest of the evening at Vauxhall. When he returned towards early morning he stared stupidly at his empty bedroom. The servants had retired. Cursing heavily as he stumbled to the basement of the house he wakened the negro who was lodged there to perform the service of watchdog through the night, and on enquiring what had become of his wife, he was informed by the man that she had retired to a small room at the top of the house and had given instructions that she was not to be disturbed.

XII

IT was about this time that William Coombe, who subsequently became famous as the author of "Doctor Syntax," was writing "The Diaboliad," a poem dedicated "to the worst man in His Majesty's dominions." He had been at Eton with young Lyttelton, and although it was not Lyttelton but his own father-in-law whom he represented in his poem as the chosen occupant of the Infernal throne while Satan goes on holiday, the claims of Lyttelton, but for this sole exception, stand highest in the list of wicked candidates ; while Captain Ayscough appears in as contemptible a light as his cousin could have wished.

To measure the depths of Lyttelton's vices, it is necessary to read his own letters, in which the literary style is as perfect as the fearless admission of faults ⁷ is bewildering. His contempt for Mary's literary efforts was the natural expression of a brilliant, ambitious mind for the flimsy felicities of mediocrity, and the existence of the Robinsons altogether represented a fact pitilessly minute in the life of the rising young statesman whose public integrity was as stainless as his private intrigues were unspeakable.

Little more than a year had elapsed since his father's death. "I awoke, and behold I was a lord !" he wrote. It was the turning-point in his career. From the desultory writing of amorous verse in which he exposed

his own turpitude with unblushing exactness, he now passed to the conscientious study of oratory ; and his speeches in the House of Lords showed results which went far to justify the opinion of Dr. Barnard, head-master of Eton, who had declared Lyttelton's talents superior to those of young Fox. The crisis in America gave the budding orator an excellent opportunity. He was all for the supremacy of the Crown, and contended hotly that the right to govern included the right to tax. King George, or even the devil himself, could have had no stouter advocate. The public eminence into which he rapidly rose rewarded him for his activity. He liked to imagine his father's friends compelled into admiration for what they would regard as this splendid transition from the wildness of Prince Hal to the wisdom of King Henry. How simple-minded were the majority of men, how reluctant to grasp the philosophic axiom that mental perspicacity and moral rectitude are not bound together like inseparable allies in a man's composition !

With Lyttelton the indulgence of private vice added zest to the defence of public welfare. To wrong individuals and avenge even a look that threatened State rights with insult, made life full, various, engrossing. To define treason and affix the stigma of legal crime to American rebellion with relentless precision in the teeth of Lord Camden with his slippery evasions, to champion British supremacy against the perils of compromise, even when advocated by the Chatham whom he revered, was an exhilarating occupation. But why should it be less exhilarating to plot with all the skill in his power at a young wife's ruin ? A night at Vauxhall with all the diverting minutiae of

an embroglie was as enjoyable as an afternoon of impassioned debate in the senate. Tom Robinson was only one in a little world of blacklegs who were willingly suffered to congregate at his lordship's house in Hill Street and sponge upon his hospitality for the merriment which they provided ; and Lyttelton enjoyed the rapid passage from the splendour and the consequence of the Upper Chamber to the sordid and gay irresponsibility of subterranean intrigue.

To involve Tom more deeply in financial embarrassment he inveigled him into parties made to Richmond and Salt Hill, to Ascot Heath and to Epsom, successfully drowning all that lingered of discretion in the young reprobate by repeated assurances that he should shortly obtain a lucrative and honourable appointment. But Mary's artlessness was a match for all his artifice. She loathed the sight of him. The arrogance of his manner, the slovenliness of his dress, the involuntary superiority of his wit, which seemed to invest him with an unfair advantage in conversation, all contributed to the growth of her aversion. "I believe you would rather elope with Fitzgerald than spend half an hour in Lyttelton's company," said Tom, and there was justice if not truth in the observation.

It was not surprising that Fitzgerald should win her goodwill if not her confidence. Here indeed was a lover of another colour. When Squire Conolly of Castletown had shut the high garden gate against this Desmond who made soft eyes at his daughter, Fitzgerald put silver shoes to his mare, took the six feet at a leap, and caracolled gracefully upon the lawn, to the astonishment of the lady, who chanced to be sitting at the drawing-room window of the house, and to the

mighty indignation of her father. High words passed between the Squire and the obstinate suitor, and one fine moonlight night soon after, the gallant Captain and the young mistress of Castletown eloped in a chaise and four. The horses were spankers, and had carried the couple far on the road to Dover before the chase was given. But they were married next morning, and took ship for Calais on their way to Paris. What a difference from Lyttelton's marriage with Apphia Witts, the unhappy lady towards whom, by his own confession, he exhibited "assiduity without love, tenderness without sincerity, dalliance without desire."

In Paris Fitzgerald lost large sums at play to the Comte d'Artois; and Louis XVI., who had heard of his daring and his duels, said sulkily, "He ought to be brother to Jack the Giant-killer." But after the famous stag hunt in the forest of Fontainebleau, in which Fitzgerald joined the royal party, the King ceased to speak of him in jest. Where the Seine crosses the forest was a three-foot wall with a clear drop of fourteen feet into the river on the other side. The stag made for the wall, and Fitzgerald, forgetting the laws of etiquette in the heat of the chase, outstripped the royal party, and before they had had time to express their displeasure horse and rider had disappeared over the wall. Queen Marie Antoinette, a mere girl of scarce twenty, shrieked as she saw this hot-blooded Irishman jump. The attendant ladies shrieked too. But Fitzgerald landed safely with his horse on the opposite bank of the river and had the honour of bringing the stag to bay before the Court could come up. Luckily he had sense enough left to reserve the *coup de grâce* for the monarch, but

he was obliged to wait as long as twenty minutes until the huntsmen had obtained boats to ferry them across the river.

It was with these honours fresh upon him that he was now basking in the sunshine of English fashionable life. Towards Mary his manner had been admirably restrained since the occasion on which the ardour of his emotions had betrayed him into a passionate declaration. He had called a few times at Hatton Garden, always maintaining a grave demeanour and staying but a few minutes. Occasionally, as if by inadvertence, some fresh warning against Lyttelton would escape from him, but he would check himself in the midst of a sentence, and his natural contrition secured an immediate pardon for the indiscretion of raising that unhappy topic. Thus he had succeeded in establishing tranquil relations between Mary and himself, and on his proposing that the Robinsons should join him in a small party to Vauxhall, Mary saw no necessity for declining the invitation. It was late in the May of 1775 and a premature midsummer heat was upon the town, making the evening air of the open pleasure-garden doubly acceptable after confinement to the house during the day.

This was the period of Vauxhall at its meridian under Tom Tyers, when the nightingales ceased their song to listen to the warbling notes of Mrs. Weichsell, when the music lasted until eleven o'clock and the company did not go home until the early hours of the morning. More than two thousand lights—a prodigious number for those days—burst into a sudden glow when the gardens opened. A great statue of Aurora stood like a guardian angel at the confines of the



From an original miniature painting.

GEORGE ROBERT FITZGERALD.

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grounds, and festive scenes painted on gigantic canvases glimmered at the visitor through long vistas of trees.

The absence of Lord Lyttelton added repose to Mary's enjoyment of the captivating scene. To give ease to their movements, it had been agreed among the party not to meet until after the concert. At eleven o'clock they would assemble for supper in the circle where now stood Roubillac's portentous marble statue of the late Mr. Handel as Orpheus. To the surprise of both Mary and Tom they found themselves, soon after entering the gardens, separated from the rest of the party. The warmth of the night had attracted an unusually large number of visitors, and in seeking to avoid the crowd they had wandered far from the orchestra into the cool darkness of the Lovers' Walk, where the music fell upon their ears in fitful blares that died almost instantaneously into silence. Fugitive figures peeped here and there among the trees, and the faint rustle of skirts on the paths added a note of intimacy to the enchantment of solitude. Tom knew his Vauxhall well, and smiled to himself at the irony of fate which had made him the companion of his own wife on this occasion in so sequestered a region of the gardens. The novelty of the situation tickled him, and he was disposed to try the effect of making amorous advances. What better opportunity would he find than this for a reconciliation? But at the first sign of his intention Mary broke from him.

"Let us return to the music," said she. "Or, if you are bent on staying, perhaps Miss Wilmot will lend you her company. She cannot be far away. Let me seek her and send her to you."

Tom started, but was too surprised to venture on denial. "How came you to know?" said he.

She ignored the question. Other discoveries had come upon her since her visit to Soho. The parlour of the house in Hatton Garden was frequently visited by Mr. King, to whom Mary had been obliged to address herself for money before her visit to Wales. Tom and he were often closeted together for hours, and other bearded gentlemen came and went on secret business which she suspected with justice must concern her husband's growing embarrassments. Once, when Tom chanced to be out, she had questioned one of these mysterious visitors closely, and had found difficulty in concealing her despair when he stumbled into an admission that Mr. Robinson, before his marriage, had contracted a heavy debt in which he was still involved. As he spoke he had scanned Mary's clothes with critical impertinence, as if he were secretly calculating their value. "Meester Ropinson was too font of a cerdun laydee before his merritch," he said, shaking his head lugubriously. "He still spends money on her, and she is expenzif. Ach! de follies of Cupit!" These revelations had sealed Mary's lips until now. She had never loved her husband, and where there was no passion there could be no jealousy. The infamy of his conduct mortified her, but she would have preferred not to tax him with it, had circumstances allowed. Since her visit to Miss Wilmot they had spoken little together, and never in earnest. Now, when she had thought to enjoy a few hours of relaxation from the strain put upon her by her knowledge, the necessity of acquainting him with the state of her information had been rudely thrust upon her. It

was a mechanical necessity, and she answered to its demands with mechanical nicety.

“ You need not trouble to hide anything from me,” said she quietly as she walked with determined footsteps towards the crowd and the music. “ Sooner or later I must know all, and already I know enough. Your extravagance must land us in ruin—very shortly, unless your uncle will help. If you have no respect for your marriage vows, common prudence——”

“ Oh, the marriage vows ! ” sighed Tom. “ Who of our acquaintance respects them ? They have been weighed and found wanting. When you talk of debts, I say that is none of your business. You could not understand were I to explain. When you talk of marriage vows——” He paused, and then continuing in a sudden passionate outburst, “ Why should I care for them — did my father trouble about marriage when I was about to come into the world ? This gay, delightful world,” he went on, waving his hand at the crowd in the gardens, as if for him the whole world lay within their confines. “ You say you know enough already, but until now I spared you the knowledge of what others saw not fit to spare me. They were more honest, as you would call it. Confound such honesty ! And yet, were he more generous with his purse, I could forgive my father. Morals are well enough in the pulpit. But they sound faintly in the ears when the blood sings.”

His outburst awakened a momentary pity in Mary as they passed into the seclusion of a pavilion, in order that they might pursue their conversation without the hazard of interruption.

“ One of the first things I learned in my profession,”

said Tom, “was that in English law you cannot legitimise a child born out of wedlock. They understand these things better in France. Do you hate me all the more for what I have told you?”

Mary shook her head. Her dislike of Mr. Harris had deepened at his communication, but in becoming aware of this fact she felt conscious of taking sides with her husband against his father. She had been cozened into her marriage, but she did not hold herself guiltless for her own want of resistance.

“Our marriage was a mistake,” said she sadly, “and the burden of that mistake must rest more heavily upon me. There is no escape, no escape. Let us go and join the others. I have not the heart to speak more on this subject. Listen! The music draws to a close.”

For a minute they sat at the open window of the pavilion while the applause of the multitude mingling with a babble of conversation greeted the triumphant finale of the orchestra. Then in silence they picked their way to the place of meeting, where Mr. Fitzgerald already stood awaiting their arrival, a conspicuous figure even in that gay assemblage, the button and loop of his hat, his sword-knot and buckles all brilliant with diamonds that twinkled in the light of the neighbouring lanterns, his coat and vest as rich as the brocade and velvet of the finest French looms could make them, and two enamelled watch-chains with a profusion of seals dangling from either fob.

The other three members of the party were already in the box, to which Mr. Fitzgerald conducted Tom and Mary. A more enchanting scene it would be impossible

to imagine than this circle of brightly illumined boxes, each with its supper table and convivial little company of stylish people. The noise and the turbulence of the evening were over, the majority of people having left the gardens or wandered far from their most expensive quarter. From the centre of the leafy circle glimmered the great statue of Handel at a zone of bright faces flushed with the wine of Burgundy and Oporto. The intimacy of each box was increased rather than diminished by the spectacle of the neighbouring parties seen through a disorderly framework of foliage which swayed and rustled in the breeze. Three sides of the table only were used for the guests, so that they might all enjoy the animation of the scene.

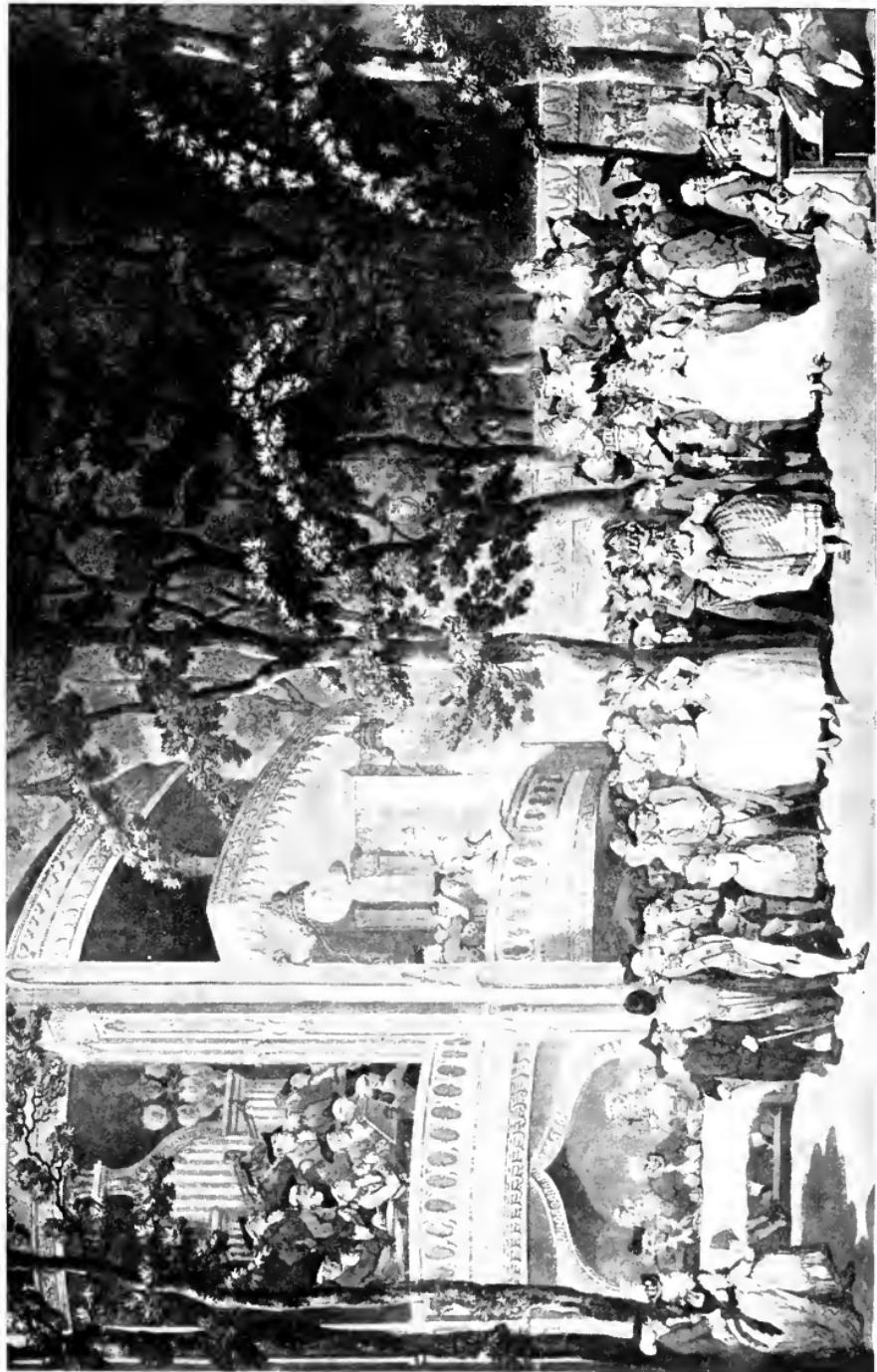
“This is better than a theatre,” cried Fitzgerald gaily as he took his seat between Mary and her good friend Lady Yea. On Mary’s other side sat Mr. William Brereton the actor, and at the extreme edge of the box sat Mrs. Parry on the one side and Tom on the other. The lobsters were excellent. So was the red port, and the spirits of the company rose under the genial influence of their warm-hearted host. Soon they were listening to his sparkling anecdotes on the Court of Versailles and laughing at his droll picture of the French King, whom he mimicked with considerable skill, pronouncing his French with easy perfection. When they asked him about the Queen, he placed his hand on his heart and broke into rapturous description. He called the Comte d’Artois a much overrated man, but omitted to tell them how he had come by his opinion. The fact was, that he had owed the nobleman some three

thousand livres which he had lost to him at play. The Comte did not press him for payment, but Fitzgerald seeing him some weeks later at the card-table, had openly offered to bet another thousand with his opponent against the chances of d'Artois. This was too much for the Frenchman, and there had been a scuffle in which the Irishman was thrown downstairs. Some said this was the origin of his lameness, for since his return from France he limped slightly ; but on Mrs. Parry enquiring if he had hurt his foot :

“A mere scratch in the heel, Madam, in a duel with a beggarly Frenchman who insulted the Queen,” cried he. Then he called for more wine in which to drink the health of the loveliest sovereign in the world.

The conversation passed from the Court to the theatre, and the talents of Sophie Arnould, and then Mr. Brereton diverted the company with a spirited account of his own stage experiences. Mary listened eagerly to his stories, and her mind was stirred by the memory of her old ambitions. A few weeks after her marriage she had met Mr. Garrick in the street, and he had offered her his formal congratulations. But she fancied she detected a slight irritation in his manner, and she was right ; for Garrick suspected the influence that had been brought to bear upon her in order to dissuade her from the stage, and he had had too much worry in reconciling his own family to his profession to have much sympathy with others who shared the same prejudice.

The interest of the company in Mr. Brereton's stories grew particularly keen when he talked of



From an engraving, after a drawing by Thomas Rowlandson.

VAUXHALL GARDENS.



Mrs. Abington. She was the liveliest, the wittiest, the most wicked creature imaginable. She could play the fine lady and talk the language of a bargeman almost in one breath, as it were ; and it was delightful to hear Brereton describe her running off the stage as the duchess in a comedy of high life, and cursing her maid for having ill-fastened the loop of her gown in the lurid vocabulary of St. Giles's. The ladies were unanimous in their admiration of her taste in dress. She had, indeed, invented a style which had become the rage, and the demurest young misses in the kingdom were all asking their milliners for the Abington cap, and begging them to cut their costumes in the negligent flowing pattern which became the actress so well.

“ If they knew the lady,” said Brereton, “ I wonder if they would be so eager to copy her style. She always looks as if she had tumbled into her clothes. But her falls, I admit, are flights of genius.”

The gentlemen were convulsed with laughter at the witticism. Mrs. Parry now rose to take leave of the company, and her example was followed by Lady Yea. Mr. Brereton begged permission to accompany them to their carriages, and Tom and Mary were left alone in the box with Mr. Fitzgerald. The hour was late and the night sultry. The starless sky hung, almost with the oppression of a low ceiling, over the gardens. Now and then, as some party broke up, the lights in a box disappeared, leaving black gaps in the circle of bright faces. Tom was heavy with wine. Mary was thinking of Mrs. Abington and grieving over her own baffled aspirations. Fitzgerald was humming a French melody and gazing vacantly out of the box.

Suddenly a noise was heard from the neighbourhood of a pavilion out of which two gentlemen emerged in furious altercation. In a moment they were surrounded by a crowd. Fitzgerald ran swiftly out of the box followed by Tom, who obeyed a blind instinct to accompany him without having observed the motive of his departure. Mary rose also, but before she could attract the attention of either Tom or his host, they were lost in the crowd. Fearing to miss them altogether if she ventured in search of them, she resumed her place in the box. In a few minutes Fitzgerald returned.

“Robinson is gone to seek you at the entrance to the gardens,” said he, “but I felt certain you had not quitted the box. Let me conduct you at once to the door, for your husband will be uneasy.”

Mary took his arm and they ran hastily to the entrance door on the Vauxhall Road. But Tom was nowhere to be seen.

“Don’t be alarmed,” cried Fitzgerald, “he was here five minutes ago,” and they passed through the door into the road. Mary’s eyes pierced the darkness to where at some distance from the entrance stood her own carriage, which she recognised by the shape of the lanterns. But before she could reach it, Fitzgerald stopped abruptly: a servant opened the door to a chaise and four; by the light from the lamps on the footpath Mary plainly perceived a pistol in the lining, and drew back. In a moment she felt Fitzgerald’s arm round her waist as he attempted with some violence to lift her up the step of the chaise. Even in the distress of the moment she saw the impassive servant watching the scuffle at a short distance from the chaise.

“Vile devil!” cried Mary, as by a desperate effort she succeeded in twisting herself from his grasp. His hand trembled.

“Robinson can but fight me,” said he, as he tried once more to compel her into the chaise. But she slipped from under his arm and ran nimbly to the entrance door, followed by her persecutor.

“Ah, here he comes at last,” cried Fitzgerald blandly, as the figure of Tom greeted him in the doorway. His voice was free from all traces of perturbation. “We have been looking everywhere for you,” he continued, “and I fear Mrs. Robinson was beginning to be seriously alarmed.” He cheerfully accepted Tom’s offer of a ride, for he lodged at no great distance from Hatton Garden, and as he entered the carriage, “We nearly made a strange mistake and took possession of another man’s equipage,” said he, and then explained how it had been his intention to leave Mrs. Robinson in her carriage and start once more in search of Tom.

The young gentleman was too sleepy to pay much heed to what he said; moreover, the difficulty of hearing was increased by the rattle of the wheels on the road and the noise of the storm which had now broken loose.

“Mercy on us, what a pale face!” cried a gentleman who in crossing the street passed the window of the Robinsons’ carriage as a flash of lightning cast its lurid glare on Mary’s tight lips and terror-stricken face. She never uttered a syllable on their way to Hatton Garden.

XIII

TOM's affairs had now reached a stage at which it was no longer possible to avert a catastrophe. At the suit of an annuitant an execution was levied upon his effects, and the coarse laughter of the valuers soon resounded in the elegant apartments in Hatton Garden. The furniture, the china, even the pictures on the walls were swept into the sacrifice. Tom was at his wits' end to know what to do. He began to see the folly of having trusted to Lord Lyttelton, for whenever he called at Hill Street his lordship was either out of town or so deeply engaged in parliamentary business that he could see no one. A series of letters asking for advice and help fared no better. The first produced an evasive reply ; the others remained unanswered. It was a confounded nuisance to be put in such a hole at the opening of a season which promised a rich harvest of amusement. Moreover, the sale of his effects in Hatton Garden by no means exhausted his liabilities. The loan of a friend's house at Finchley afforded a temporary asylum, and he was content that Mrs. Darby should come from Bristol to stay with her daughter at a time when she needed help and consolation in the approaching crisis in her life. Of the whole retinue of servants in Hatton Garden, one alone chose to throw in his lot with the misfortunes of his employers. This was the negro. The others

left in a body, taking marked delight in adding to the confusion which reigned in the house, and rousing Tom to a pitch of fury by the unrestrained insolence of their observations.

To Mary the removal to Finchley appeared no misfortune. The bolt had fallen, but life still went on, and the solitude of Finchley was more in accordance with her frame of mind than the turbulence of the metropolis. She was glad that business transactions kept her husband much in London, for thus she was able to enjoy her mother's company without the disturbing necessity of offering explanations on which she had no wish to dwell. Whatever faults Mrs. Darby possessed she was deeply attached to her daughter. She had no need to enquire with particularity into the circumstances of Mary's misfortunes, nor to add to them by extorting from her the humiliating admission that Tom was a failure. Moreover her daughter's condition compelled her to look into the future without indulging in a retrospect as futile as it was painful. Together the mother and daughter prepared the infant's wardrobe, and Mary took pleasure in cutting the fine muslin of many dresses into frocks and robes in which a maternal solicitude was exhibited in pleasing alliance with a milliner's fancy.

But the serenity of this new life was rudely interrupted, for Tom, realising that his creditors were inexorable, could no longer afford to endanger his personal liberty by remaining in the neighbourhood of London. Nothing remained but to make to his father an unreserved confession of his obligations, and trust that the exigencies of Mary's situation would,

at least, obtain for her the attention and consideration upon which common humanity insisted. At Tregunter Tom would be outside the zone of his creditors, and for a time at least the Robinsons could rest from the incessant importunities to which they were exposed so long as they were accessible.

Mr. Harris did not reply to his son's letter, in which, with a mixture of cunning and contrition, Tom announced his intention of coming once more to Wales. The cost of providing for his son and daughter-in-law for a limited period would not be heavy, and the humiliation of the young people confronted daily with their benefactor would be a salutary experience. Mrs. Molly's vindictive nature rejoiced in the prospect of the visit. Tom's sister was less elated. She disliked Mary, but felt some commiseration for Mary's present distress, priding herself on a power to distinguish between the vanity and weakness of her sister-in-law and the unpardonable follies of her brother.

Mary was filled with dismay when Tom informed her of his intentions. To be compelled into the society of people so unsympathetic to her as her relatives in Wales, at a time when, of all others, she could least dispense with her mother's company, was almost unbearable. But the alternative of allowing Tom to go alone was not practicable ; at Finchley they were certain to be subjected to annoyance from the creditors, and by the time the child was expected they would not have money enough for their daily wants. In spite of the sorrows which her brief married life had brought to her, she did not yet despair of a more fortunate issue, for when there is most ground for despair it takes the bitterness of a longer experience

than Mary's to extinguish all hope. If Mr. Harris would help his son to disentangle himself from his present embarrassments, it would not be impossible to live on a small and regular income. Even before her marriage she had been made familiar with the vicissitudes of luxury and penury, and in her judgment of Tom it was only natural that she should mix some leniency borrowed from her incurable affection for her father in spite of his misdeeds.

Tom himself was moved by the parting between his wife and her mother. Their tears were all the more eloquent for the few words spoken. Neither of them slept much the night before, for Mary was thinking of the long, tiresome journey and the cold welcome at the end of it ; and Mrs. Darby was praying for her child's happy deliverance from the sorrows and responsibilities which had fallen upon her. If only they might remain together ! But the parting had to come, was even there before either of them could anticipate the full pain of it in reflection. The harness of the horses jingled ; the boxes were safely stowed (these were fewer than on the occasion of their first visit to Tregunter) ; the postboy sounded his horn ; the last kiss was given, and Mary, with her eyes dim with tears, had sprung into the coach. Tom stood reluctant, like a schoolboy at the prospect of a new term with a score of old punishments still unfulfilled, until the wheels began to move and the impatient passengers to shout. Then he jumped in by the side of Mary, the door banged, and in a few minutes the coach had disappeared from Mrs. Darby's sight.

The arrival at Tregunter exceeded Mary's worst

expectations. Mrs. Molly said nothing, but looked volumes ; Miss Betsy's face wore an air of impenetrable reserve. Mr. Harris sent Mary crying to her room with his brutal greeting.

" Well," said he, " so you have escaped from a prison, and now you are come here to do penance for your follies ! How long do you think that I will support you ? What business have beggars to marry ? "

At Tom's intercession he laughed. It was useless to represent to him that Mary was in no way responsible for their calamity, that her own debts did not exceed fifty pounds. The old man was so cunning that he did not give Tom credit for ingenuousness, even when he spoke the truth. Miss Betsy took a fairer view of the matter, but she took care not to express her opinion in the presence of Tom and his wife. The manor house was not yet complete, and Mary wandered from one cheerless room to another, as much to avoid the company of her persecutors as to seek some occupation with which to pass the wearisome hours. Accustomed to the society of books she looked but dared not ask for the library, but it soon became apparent that this pompous building did not include such a convenience. As if to embitter her solitude by the pains of remembrance, the chimney-pieces she had chosen at Bristol were fixed in their places, and the rough sketches of the artist whom she had sent at the request of Mr. Harris to Tregunter, were on the walls. " The Squire " came upon his daughter-in-law one day while he was making a tour of inspection round the house ; she was trying to amuse herself by playing on an old spinnet in one of the parlours.

"This is no occupation for you, my girl," said he roughly. "You ought to be thinking of getting your bread. What right, I should like to know, have women of no fortune to follow the pursuits of fine ladies? Tom had better married a good tradesman's daughter than the child of a ruined merchant, who is not capable of earning her living."

"I meant no harm," said Mary as she rose from the instrument.

"No harm! no harm! They all say the same," replied Mr. Harris peevishly as he hurried from her presence. In the evening a large party assembled for dinner. Mary did not dare to ask for leave to remain in her room. She knew that to do so would be to provoke sarcastic observations on her nicety. English manners have suffered a great change since those days; but conventional reticence, while it has its uses in checking an overflow of coarseness, must not be mistaken all for refinement. No secret was made of Mary's condition among the company on that evening, and it was regarded as a polite attention when a gentleman expressed his satisfaction that Mrs. Robinson was come to give Tregunter a little stranger.

"Your house," added he as he turned to his host, "will be finished just in time for a nursery."

"No, no," replied Mr. Harris, laughing immodestly, "they came here because prison doors were open to receive them."

An awkward silence fell upon those who had the misfortune to hear the remark. Tom flushed with indignation. He felt as if he would like to expose his father before the whole company, and his hands were clasped and unclasped in nervous fury under the

table. To cover Mary's confusion the gentleman who had provoked this savage outburst now engaged her in conversation upon the neighbouring scenery, as if nothing had occurred to disturb their natural interchange of opinions.

When the guests had gone, Tom remonstrated with his father on his conduct, and begged him once more to concentrate the full force of his censure upon the guilty party and leave Mary unmolested. But Mr. Harris evaded the point of the rebuke by repeating with emphasis that he was not going to have Tregunter turned into a nursery, and that Mrs. Robinson could go elsewhere for her confinement. It was in vain that Miss Betsy now volunteered to undertake the necessary arrangements for preparing a suitable apartment in the house. Mr. Harris flatly refused to sanction the proposal, and it was clear that in doing so he had the full support of Mrs. Molly. Happily Mary was not present at the numerous consultations which took place upon the subject ; she was within a fortnight of her time, and it was imperative that provision should be made for her without further delay.

Miss Betsy now bethought herself of a plan for the solution of the difficulty. She was not of an amiable disposition by nature, but the inhumanity of the others aroused in her a valuable spirit of opposition. Her religion may have been narrow, but it was sincere. The theology of the Huntingdonians might be called weak, but it should never be said that they were heartless in the presence of distress. Above all theirs was a practical religion, whose votaries did not throw away opportunities for vindicating its claims to

existence. A portion of Trevecca House, the seminary founded by Lady Huntingdon with the aid of Mr. Harris's brother, had been converted into a flannel manufactory. The place was but a mile and a half distant from Tregunter; its inmates were all of the new sect. Miss Betsy now proposed to exercise her influence as a member of the same school of religion to obtain apartments for Mrs. Robinson in this wing of the building. Mary received the suggestion with undisguised delight. Miss Betsy checked her sister-in-law's expression of gratitude. She wanted to be useful; she disliked sentimental effusions. Within a few days she had completed negotiations with Trevecca House, and Mary, feeling like a prisoner released, departed from Tregunter. With the consent of Mr. Harris, Miss Betsy engaged a nurse for the appointed date. Mrs. Jones, the widow of a tradesman in Brecon, was selected, a sensible woman who possessed many qualities not usually associated with persons engaged in trade. Mr. Harris, on receiving a description of her, thought that she would be an excellent companion for his "butterfly" Mary, who might learn useful lessons from a working woman. But Mrs. Jones fell in love with her charge at the first interview, and, obeying the instincts of a kind heart and a refined nature, endeared herself to Mary by entirely different methods from those with which she was credited by Mr. Harris.

The situation of Mary's new dwelling was suited for the indulgence of that tender melancholy which even as a child she had known how to enjoy. Here, it is true, was no ancient Gothic pile, but the lonely position of the house at the foot of a mountain known

from its shape as the Sugar Loaf, and the untamed luxuriance of the valley into which it seemed to have been dropped as from above, without the link of a village road to connect it with civilisation, appealed with magical force to Mary's peculiar sense of romance. The sudden relief from the strain of uncongenial company, the solemn beauty of autumnal tints, for it was now October, the respectful solicitude of those about her, helped to produce in her a sensation of almost preternatural calm. As from her little parlour window she watched the moonbeams fall, mildly effulgent amid the ancient yew-trees that shaded the little garden, she imagined herself a child again, new to the mysterious beauties of nature. The intervening period of her marriage receded from her memory, or, when it occurred to her, was clothed in a semblance of unreality. How fugitive all human emotion appeared in comparison with the permanent beauties of the surrounding universe ! By the light of such contemplation, what was Vauxhall but the ludicrous parody of Nature's poem ? Had her solitude lasted long enough she would have sighed, no doubt, for the diversions of the parody ; as it was, she drew deep breaths as she wandered on the mountain-side and peered up at the indigo-blue vapours round its summit, while sometimes she would go out as soon as the sun rose and follow some dew-bespangled track in the wood, letting the wet branches of the briars caress her face as she went, and when her course became obstructed, pushing them from her with the gentleness of one loath to part with a friend.

Tom was heartily glad to be away from Tregunter,

for his father showed no disposition to help him and lost no opportunity for lecturing him. Mary was content that he should spend the day with companions, so long as he was at Trevecca in time to sup with her. The cruelty of Mr. Harris, and the circumstances under which they were now thrown more closely together, acted favourably in inducing her to think that Tom was not irredeemable, and they both felt grateful to Miss Betsy for her kind offices. The honest people in the flannel manufactory were immensely excited when it was announced to them that Mrs. Robinson had given birth to a daughter, and nothing would satisfy them until Mrs. Jones had submitted to their enthusiastic inspection the little creature wrapped in a blanket of their own making. She was hailed, as Mrs. Jones took care to inform her mother, as "the young Squire's baby, the little heiress to Tregunter."

Mary smiled at the nurse's rapturous account of this strange introduction. Tregunter seemed to her a very small spot indeed in the whole world to which her child was heiress in the very fact of its inexplicable existence. Mr. Harris himself now entered, and after a brief enquiry as to her health, seated himself by the bedside and began an impatient recital of family worries without considering the indelicacy of talking so freely in the presence of Mrs. Jones.

"Well!" said he, as a movement of the bedclothes recalled him from the selfish indulgence of his own woes, "and what do you mean to do with your child?"

Mary made no reply. The question appeared utterly meaningless to her. He might as sensibly

have asked her what she was going to do with a starlight night when she was abroad in the beauty of it.

"I will tell you what to do with the child," continued he; "tie it to your back and work for it. Prison doors are open, you know. Tom will die in a gaol; and then what is to become of you?"

This time he did not stay to become aware that his question was left again unanswered, but disappeared from the room as unceremoniously as he had entered it. Before Mary had had leisure to dwell on his amazing insensibility, Miss Betsy stood by the bedside. Mary hoped that now at least she would be allowed to express her gratitude for what had been done on her behalf, and she waited for a word from her visitor which should encourage her to proceed. But Miss Betsy gazed from the child to the mother and from the mother to the child without uttering a syllable. Then, in a voice from which it might fairly be assumed that she was deeply in love with her own compassion, "Poor little wretch!" she murmured to herself. "Poor thing! It would be a mercy if it pleased God to take it!"

Mary wondered for how long she was to be subjected to the cruelty of her husband's relations; but although they succeeded in wounding her, she felt an indescribable superiority to their insults in virtue of the new dignity conferred upon her by motherhood; and the contrast to their conduct afforded in the untiring devotion of Mrs. Jones and the kindly sentiments of the workpeople in the manufactory, placed them in a light so strange as to be happily

almost unintelligible. Nevertheless when Tom informed her that he had received letters warning him that his place of concealment was known to his creditors, she rejoiced in the opportunity offered for a speedy departure. The child, who had been christened Maria Elizabeth, was only three weeks old when it was decided to visit Mrs. Darby's mother in Monmouth. The good Mrs. Jones was distressed at the notion of Mary's travelling so soon ; but to delay departure was inexpedient, and by taking elaborate precautions to secure the comfort of her patient and expressing her readiness to accompany the Robinsons as far as Abergavenny, Mrs. Jones showed that she was eager to make the best of difficult circumstances. It is hardly necessary to add that Tom's family offered no opposition to the project ; and Mrs. Molly had entirely ignored the existence of the Robinsons on their removal to Trevecca.

So a postchaise was engaged, and once more the fugitives entered upon a long journey. The people in the manufactory turned out in a body to bid them farewell, and in spite of its paleness Mary's face wore a look of pride and pleasure as she smiled at the little Maria who lay placidly on a pillow on Mrs. Jones's lap. They reached Abergavenny the same evening and decided to rest there the night. Mary felt genuinely sorry to take leave of Mrs. Jones, who was obliged to return to her daughter at Brecon. Both women cried at the parting, and when Mary stood alone by the side of her child she was overwhelmed with indescribable anxieties for its welfare. But Nature, who takes small account of angry creditors and inhuman fathers, had left her in sound health after her ordeal. She could rejoice

in the fact that no number of executions on her husband could rob her child of a mother's nourishment, and in nursing the little Maria she found a consolation that grew with every day and soon extinguished all the timidity of inexperience.

XIV

NOTHING could have contributed so quickly to Mary's complete recovery as her grandmother's warm welcome. The old lady, who was close on seventy years of age, lived in a house of which the garden adjoined the ancient ruins of Monmouth Castle. It is singular that on her mother's side conjugal happiness had been unknown in Mary's family for three generations. In her youth "Grandmamma Elizabeth" had been distinguished for her beauty, her love of the poor, and a knowledge of botany which she turned to valuable account in ministering to the wants of sick peasants. Personal grief in her marriage had not embittered her mild and sweetly forgiving nature, and her simple piety impressed Mary no less than the undisguised display of her affection consoled her for the pain of her recent experience at Tregunter. The little Maria was tenderly embraced, and Mary felt invigorated each time she listened to enquiry after "the dear great-grandchild." Many were the tales of past days told by Grandmamma Elizabeth as she sat in her dress of plain brown silk at the family fireside. She could remember Queen Anne, and could look quite mischievous when she spoke with admiration of the romantic Young Pretender and the rebellion of '45, when a price of thirty thousand pounds had been put on that hot young head. Thirty years had passed since

then, and Charles Edward was now a middle-aged gentleman living in Italy on the pension granted to him by the French Government on his recent marriage with Louisa Princess of Stolberg. But it was said that the old habit of drink was once more gaining ascendency over him, and as she thought of that ill-starred career, Grandmamma Elizabeth sighed.

Mary explored every corner of the ruined castle, and spent many an agreeable hour wandering on the banks of the Wye. The days passed with an easy serenity. On Sundays she accompanied her grandmother to church. How had she come to neglect the habit in London? She blamed herself all the more because her husband had shown himself insensible to the appeal of religion, and in succumbing to his influence she had silently condoned the offence. Tom openly declared himself not good enough to go to church, but she wondered why it had never occurred to her to tell him that he could not be bad enough to justify him in staying away. He was restless during their sojourn in Monmouth, and was always expecting to receive another execution. The company bored him, and when he received an invitation to accompany his wife to a ball at a neighbour's he persuaded Mary to accept, and even flattered her vanity when she hesitated, by asking her if she had already forgotten, in the duties of motherhood, how to dance. Grandmamma Elizabeth took sides with him on this occasion, urging, to Tom's satisfaction, the duty of maintaining a proper gaiety of spirits while she was yet young. That settled the matter. "Take care of her, Mr. Robinson," said the old lady, smiling with gracious approval at her granddaughter as Mary appeared in a dress of pale lilac lustrine which she had put on for

the occasion and a wreath of white flowers on her head, "for she will be the beauty of the evening."

"None will suspect the existence of the child when they see the mother," replied Tom, laughing. But Mary hastened to inform him that the child was coming to the ball; for she was to be brought in the course of the evening to an ante-chamber to take her regular nourishment.

The dance was a great success, and Grandmamma Elizabeth's prediction was amply fulfilled. Every one admired the graceful figure of the young Mrs. Robinson, and the easy accomplishment of her steps provoked many compliments. From the time when the ballet master at Oxford House had expressed his delight at her talents, and even earlier (for as a child she had improvised dances before she had been taught any regular steps), Mary had been familiar with the fine art of dancing—not the mechanical placing of the legs in set patterns, but such inspired movement of the whole body to the rhythm of sweet music as would have won praise from Monsieur Noverre himself, whom Garrick called "the Shakespeare of the Ballet."

This was Mary's first appearance in an assembly since her confinement, and for a few minutes she was quite bewildered by the lights, the music, and the babble of voices. She felt no shyness but an indefinable sense of separation from the people who were in the room. They were like familiar figures encountered in a dream, figures in whose substantiality the dreamer, beset with an over-acute sense of his own reality, is reluctant to believe. But as the habit of the dance reasserted its sway over Mary, the line of division between herself and the company slowly melted, surrendering her completely to the illusion

of perfect mental balance and an almost supernatural harmony with her surroundings. As she moved with sedateness and artificial coquetry through the changing figures, it was in her face no less than in her feet that the genius of the dance could be read. No painter, even in that great era of English portraiture, was ever dancer enough to have divined that in the poetry of her movement, above all to the accompaniment of music, the seductive distinction of her presence rose to its height ; and so the tale of her beauty is still only half told in the canvases of Gainsborough, Reynolds, and Romney.

Men and women paused in their own figures to look at her, but she was not dancing to win their admiration. The brightness of her eyes deepened with the exhilaration of movement, her cheeks glowed, her lips, which were closed in repose, were now parted as her breath came quickly with the pace of the allemande. Some blossoms fell from the wreath about her head. As the twinkling of her feet ceased on the last note of the music, an involuntary chorus of applause broke from those who had been watching her. She looked round as if in search of the cause for this enthusiasm, and then, perceiving that no other than herself had provoked it, fled, amid the protests of the bystanders, from the room. On her way out she was met by an attendant, who informed her that the little Maria was already waiting in the ante-chamber. After satisfying its hunger and committing it tenderly to the charge of the waiting-woman, who wrapped it in many shawls and set out to carry it home again, Mary re-entered the ballroom. She bore her honours lightly, being by now inured to adulation. In the country dances, which occupied the rest of the

evening, she showed herself no less at home than in the measured gravity of the minuet and the pointed brilliance of the allemande. Tom was besieged with compliments on his wife's talents. He did not dance much himself, but he drank himself into a condition of cheerful satisfaction with the world ; and many of the fine things said to him flattered his pride. The crash in his own affairs he knew must come before long. In the meanwhile it was pleasant to lay aside all thoughts of the morrow and figure as the enviable husband of so distinguished a wife. Cheered by the wine in him, he began almost to believe that he was indeed enviable ; and inasmuch as what was enviable must be good, that he was indeed good. As Mary and he took their leave at a later hour his attitude was entirely that of the devoted young husband.

On reaching home, however, the whole pleasure of the ball was obliterated at a stroke for Mary by the sight of her little Maria in convulsions, brought on, as she afterwards learned, by nourishment given immediately after the agitation of dancing. The whole night was spent in frenzied despair. A doctor was summoned at once, but his prescription failed to diminish the violence of the fits, which succeeded one another with alarming rapidity. As the winter morning's light crept into her chamber she still sat with the child in her arms. She had not stayed to take off her ball dress, and a few faded flowers still hung about her hair, when she received a hurried visit from a clergyman who was a friend of her grandmother's and had saved his own child under similar circumstances with a mixture of aniseed and spermaceti. He now asked leave to experiment with the same remedy on the little Maria, and as the doctor had given up all

hope of saving the child, there was good reason for welcoming even a more desperate remedy than this. On the draught being administered the child's spasmodic attacks became weaker and less frequent. In an hour they had ceased altogether and she had fallen asleep. Mary looked at the serenity of that little face in mute astonishment. For her, a lifetime lay between the gaiety of the ball and restored tranquillity after the terrible experience of that night, and as soon as she herself had recovered from the strain of helpless watching, it seemed to her that she had never loved her child until it had nearly been taken from her.

Through the whole distress of that night Tom had slept soundly in an adjoining room. He was right in supposing that he could not have been of much use to anybody had he attempted to stay up, and the next day he was fretful and anxious to leave Monmouth. They had been more than a month here, and he was afraid that his whereabouts would once more be discovered. Arrangements were accordingly concluded for a fresh departure, when an execution arrived for a considerable sum at the suit of his oldest friend. His indignation was boundless, and Mary herself could not understand what had prompted the hostile action. The creditor was indeed no other than the young man who had accompanied them in the chaise to Maidenhead Bridge after their wedding ceremony. Perhaps he had been offended at a supposed want of confidence in not acquainting him with the marriage, and was now showing his revenge. But speculation was idle in the present crisis. Tom was no longer at liberty to travel. The sheriff of the county was a friend of Grandmamma Elizabeth, and offered to accompany the young people to London in the hope



From a mezzotint engraving by W. Dickinson, after a painting by Sir Joshua Reynolds, P.R.A.

MARY ROBINSON.

that he might be of service in adjusting the matter. His suggestion was accepted with alacrity, and the three started on their tedious journey the same evening, Mary being so absorbed in the care of her child as to have little leisure for dwelling on the unpleasant cause of their departure. Grandmamma Elizabeth was sure that all would end well, and offered many words of encouragement to her young granddaughter in bidding her farewell. Mrs. Darby was in London, and would be too much rejoiced at the introduction to the little Maria to cavil over the circumstances of their sudden arrival in the metropolis.

When at last their destination was reached, Mary left the others and drove at once in a hackney coach to York Buildings, Buckingham Street, where her mother was lodging, her heart beating with the excitement of appearing thus suddenly before Mrs. Darby with all the momentous adventures crowded into the past few months to communicate. Maria lay fast asleep in her arms as she climbed the stairs of the Buildings. For a moment she hesitated as she stood at the door and looked again at the child to see if the rapidity of her movements had disturbed its slumber. But the little eyes were closed and the hands folded with comic complacency across her bosom. She opened the door. The apartment was empty. Was her mother abroad so early? She moved to a window, from which she could see the gleaming river. The slowly moving barges took her thoughts back to the day when Mr. Wayman had accompanied them to Greenwich and she had been introduced to Tom for the first time. What an age had passed since then! She decided to wait until her mother returned, and was about to seat herself by the fireside

when a door communicating with another room opened. Mrs. Darby started. In a moment the mother and daughter were in each other's arms. Neither could speak. When at last Mrs. Darby withdrew her arms from Mary's neck, something held fast to a wisp of her hair, and as with bowed head she looked to disengage herself, she caught sight of a tiny fist. The little Maria was awake.

In the meanwhile Tom and the Sheriff of Monmouth had proceeded to the house of the impatient creditor, who explained that the execution had been levied in the belief that Mr. Harris would come to the rescue. On learning that he had formed an erroneous conception of that gentleman's generosity he expressed his willingness to abandon the suit; and the matter having been arranged, Tom engaged rooms for himself and Mary near Berners Street.

Not many days had passed after their return to London when Mr. Fitzgerald acquainted Lord Lyttelton with the fact that he had seen Mrs. Robinson at Ranelagh. "This time," said the Irishman, "she was without her husband." Lyttelton smiled, and made a note to visit the Rotunda on the following evening. But if Mary had been imprudent enough to go once to Ranelagh unattended by her husband with some ladies of her acquaintance, she was wise enough not to repeat the folly. Fitzgerald had been importunate. His carriage had followed her home the night of her meeting with him, and he had had the audacity to call unbidden in the morning at her lodgings, where he found her absorbed in her duties towards her child. His manner had been respectful, but she had been obliged to decline with significant firmness an invitation to dine the next day at Richmond.

Lyttelton was rewarded by the sight of her when he visited Ranelagh ; but he was embarrassed by the presence of Tom, and wondered how the fellow could contrive to keep out of prison for so long. He was struck by the ease of Mary's manner, and noted an increased skill in the way in which she parried his advances. He likened her earlier demeanour to that of a light craft wobbling in a squall. "Now the wind sits full," said he, "in the sails of her beauty. It would need a hurricane to tear her from her course."

XV

MRS. DARBY's affection for her daughter was no idle indulgence of a luxurious sentiment. She came almost daily to her lodging and helped her to dress and tend her child. She stayed in the house while Mary took an hour in the fresh air, and she experienced satisfaction in the exercise of domestic activities for which she now lamented that her clever daughter had received no training. Common misfortune linked the two women in a fast bond of companionship. Tom's difficulties were never discussed. Soon enough, Mrs. Darby suspected, they would break through the even surface of the day's domestic routine. Tom saw little of the ladies. Was it because he was too busy, or because their presence made him doubly sensible of his own shortcomings?

When Mary returned one morning from her outing, she noted a look of unusual anxiety on her mother's face. She had been busy, as she walked, with the poems which she was now about to publish in the hope of earning a little money, and her thoughts had wandered far from the practical worries of her situation in an attempt to improve defective lines before sending them finally to press. Mrs. Darby was seated as usual by the side of the oblong basket in which Maria lay when Mary opened the door. But she did

not look up and smile as was her wont. Her head remained bowed, as if in contemplation, over the cot.

"How now?" said Mary, humming the refrain of a lullaby as she advanced to her mother. Mrs. Darby looked up.

"Something has happened?" cried Mary, glancing with a sudden fear at the cot. The sight of her child smiling and waving its hands reassured her.

"Tom has been arrested," said Mrs. Darby helplessly. "They have taken him to the house of the sheriff's officer."

The ugly warning of Mr. Harris recurred to Mary's memory. She shuddered. This time there would be no escape. Suddenly the humiliation of the last few months of enforced flight from one place to another overwhelmed her. Silently again she put on the hat and cloak which she had taken off on entering the room.

"Where are you going?" said Mrs. Darby uneasily.

"To him—to Tom," said Mary.

Mrs. Darby did not seek to dissuade her. In a few hours she returned. She had seen her husband, and was more than ever convinced of the necessity of accompanying him to whatever destination the desperate condition of his affairs would consign him. Tom was utterly dejected, and had not been able to offer any suggestion of a remedy. The sight of his distress had awakened fresh pity in Mary for her undeserving husband. Permission had been granted her to stay with him while he was in the custody of the sheriff's officer, and she now asked Mrs. Darby to bring her child there as often as was necessary. Within a few

days detainers were lodged against Mr. Thomas Robinson to the amount of twelve hundred pounds. Liberty could alone be bought by finding this sum of money, but as he reviewed each name from among the list of his dissipated companions he was obliged to realise the futility of applying to any one among them. What then? He knew enough about life in a prison to feel little alarm at the rigours which would be imposed upon him. He was not penniless, and a prison was above all a place in which you could buy favours. Many excellent people went to prison for debt, and the small allowance made to him by his father, inadequate as it was for the conduct of a fashionable life, would stand him in good stead in his new life as a debtor whose daily expenditure was regulated by the law. He did not want Mary to accompany him, for he feared she might stand between him and such pleasures as he would be able to snatch. But he was too deceitful to confess the nature of such considerations, and allowed her to urge upon him as an argument for her accompanying him, that he would better be able to support her within the prison walls than elsewhere ; nor was he cruel enough to bid her go and starve.

Three weeks passed before the arrangements had been completed for Tom's transference to prison. Had he been rich enough he needed not to have entered the building at all, but the fees for living "within the rules or liberties," as it was called, were more than he could afford. Smollett has left a vivid picture of the prison of this period, which in constitution resembled more a college than any modern institution for the housing of criminals. Nothing in its exterior

betrayed the nature of a gaol except the entrance, where the turnkeys kept watch and ward. At the end of its single street (for it was like a neat little town enclosed by a high wall) was a separate building for the better sort of Crown prisoners, and here Tom found suitable apartments in an upper floor commanding a view of the racket-ground below.

He had not been long in his new quarters before he struck up a friendship with Signor Albanesi, formerly an employee of the Royal Opera House, a talented scoundrel who sang, played the buffoon, and spent hours in the apartments of the Robinsons telling stories of gallantry and intrigue. He was something of an artist too, and engraved neat plates which obtained the admiration of Mr. Sherwin, under whom he had worked. When he was not playing rackets, Tom was usually in the society of Albanesi. The Italian knew the prison from one end to the other, and had an unerring instinct for discovering the loosest characters who could contribute to his inexhaustible passion for intrigues. Most of the women doted on him, and as he enjoyed vigorous health and did not at any time of his life care for washing, the absence of a surgeon and of a single bath within the prison walls did not affect the irrepressible flow of his spirits. Tom and he would loll down the street at night in high feather as they listened to the cursing and the cries of the hawkers at the butchers' stands, the chandlers' shops and the other booths in which tradesmen of every kind exercised their professions. Every Monday night was spent in the Wine Club, every Thursday night in the Beer Club, and these convivial gatherings lasted till the early hours of the morning. Misery scarcely ever

stalked abroad in the purlieus of the prison, but lay skulking indoors, reluctant to expose itself to the gibes of drunkards and gamblers whose audacity was heightened by continuous contact with fellow criminals in a restricted area where the whole standard of decorum was debased by foul air and filthy conditions consecrated by the sanction of law and government.

For more than nine months Mary never left the building in which she lived, and the monotonous drudgery of each day weighed upon her blithe nature with increasing severity. Sometimes she wondered if it would be her fate to die in prison, and she thought frequently of her former governess Meribah Lorrington, who, as she learned now from her mother, had died of drink in the Chelsea workhouse. Even in the seclusion of her apartments she was not secure from insult, for not only were messages delivered to her from Mr. Fitzgerald and Lord Lyttelton, inviting her to purchase freedom at the cost of what they termed a misguided respectability, but also she was forced into the company of Albanesi's wife whenever she came to visit her incorrigible husband. The Italian was so amusing that she could not deny a certain fascination in his presence, and the household duties added to those of looking after her child were arduous enough to make conversational recreation welcome. But Angelina Albanesi represented all that she most abhorred, a woman blind to every principle but self-interest. Her lovers had been numerous, and included the Count Belgiojoso. It was with women of this character in their mind that Fitzgerald and Lord Lyttelton, as she now realised, continued to hope in her ultimate surrender; and the signora, inspired no doubt by their

friendly influence, lost no opportunity of dwelling on the absurdity of her loyalty to the faithless Tom.

Mary used to wonder in her solitary hours if the signora had ever dreamed of the pains and the consolations of motherhood. She could not give even this woman credit for deliberately ignoring a whole side of human nature. As the spring deepened into summer she would spend evenings walking about the racket-court with Maria and watch the child's tiny hands stretched towards the stars as if to clutch them. At this period she was engaged on a new poem called "Captivity." Albanesi drew a frontispiece for her, smiling cynically all the while at his powers of self-suppression. "Look at it," he would say to Tom, holding it up between thumb and forefinger in an attitude of ridicule. "Who would think that this chaste lady chained to the broken column of Liberty, on which the light of a vestal lamp still burns, is the work of me, Albanesi? But is it not the artist's duty to conceal his personality?"

If the picture belied the sentiments of the draughtsman, the poem, it must be admitted, was no truer reflection of life within the walls of the prison. Mary did not look beyond the confines of her own misery, and the poem is one long sigh after an idealised retirement into a cottage "not idly gay but elegantly neat," where virtue may remain unmolested. Except for an outburst on the greedy creditor and his flinty indifference to the woes of the oppressed, the verses are a passionless performance. When Lyttelton saw them on publication, "This poem should have obtained an earlier release for Robinson," he exclaimed. "No government should detain within its prison walls the

husband of a woman who can write such bad stuff on the subject. Literature is degraded by the process. On submitting the manuscript to competent authorities, pardon should have been granted with a veto on publication, and a promise should have been exacted from the lady not to repeat the offence."

Georgiana Cavendish, the accomplished Duchess of Devonshire, thought otherwise, but her literary judgment was obscured by philanthropic motives. Mary had sent her a volume of her earlier poems, and the kind creature had taken a warm interest in Mary's misfortunes. She was a year younger than the imprisoned poetess, between whose fate and her own lay such a width of disparity that it challenged into activity all the impetuous generosity of her nature. Little more than a year had passed since she had married "the first match in England," and already she was winning golden opinions from all who enjoyed the privilege of her acquaintance. She was not content to help Mary with her patronage ; she must see her, and so by an invitation repeated more than once in terms of the greatest delicacy, she succeeded in enticing Mary from the prison to pay a call at Devonshire House. Pale and worn with her long seclusion, having almost lost the desire for contact with the fashionable world, Mary puts on a neat dress of brown satin, the smartest relic of her attenuated wardrobe, and in fear and trembling is shown into the back drawing-room of the great lady's house. Imagine the surprise of both these young ladies when the lively young Duchess sweeps into the room in that easy, turbulent manner that was so characteristic of her, and made her always look as if she were on her way to something, and to something

brave and good. She had expected—she scarcely knew what, but an apparition altogether different from this slight, timid girl with the legend of pain and suffering in her eyes. And to Mary the engaging simplicity of the Duchess was like the morning air after a night of oppression. She had expected an interview of distant formality, and instead of this, she was surprised into a love for the great young lady as soon as she was confronted with her, and without knowing how she had come by the sentiment. It was not only the ease of her own manner, but the ready art of putting other people at their ease that made of Georgiana Cavendish such a gracious figure. She could not have listened with more consideration to a Cabinet Minister than she now listened to Mary's brief account of her troubles, and she made the speaker feel that in recounting them she was conferring a benefit on the listener. Her sympathy expressed itself in no common consolatory phraseology; it was in her eye and in her attitude.

When Mary left Devonshire House, she felt as if she had suddenly become possessed of some great inexplicable gift. With the exception of her mother, she had been deprived of female society in the prison; for not one of her friends had been to visit her. She often thought with bitterness of the readiness with which they had courted her in the prosperous days of Hatton Garden. A number of small circumstances had conspired to prevent Mrs. Parry from reaching her friend on each occasion that she had set out with an intention of visiting Mary, so that the good lady was also swept into Mary's condemnation. But now balm had been poured upon Mary's wounded spirits by the sympathy which Georgiana had so well known how

to disclose. Mary felt as if she owed to her new friend a more charitable belief in the goodness of human nature, a belief which had begun to languish under the humiliations of her present existence. Nor was it chiefly by the interest displayed in her literary ambitions that Georgiana had won Mary's heart. She had enquired with genuine solicitude after her child, and had made her promise to bring it with her on the occasion of her next visit.

The darkness of her prison life was made less intolerable now to Mary by the memory of this visit and the prospect of others to come. She completed her poem on "Captivity" and wrote a dedication to the Duchess, whom she had described in lines of sympathetic admiration. With the prospect of once more rousing attention in literary circles, she began to look to the future with hope. Moreover the crowded state of the prison, which had been selected by John Howard as an object for philanthropic denunciation, had begun to be treated as a subject for legislative reform. The number of children exceeded even the number of prisoners within its walls. Frequently the floor of the chapel was used in lieu of a bed by those unable to obtain regular accommodation. When on the 23rd of May, 1776, news reached the prisoners that an Act had been passed for the Relief of Insolvent Debtors, there was much rejoicing; for every one knew that the primary object of the Bill had been to disencumber the prisons. By the end of September Tom was able to set aside some debts, give fresh security for others, and so obtain his release. Signor Albanesi was less fortunate, and expressed extravagant sorrow at parting with Tom. In fact the two had spent many merry hours together in gambling,

drinking, and playing Mississippi ; and on each occasion that Mary had gone to visit the Duchess, Tom had proved a spirited companion in a fresh intrigue.

It is very well to be impatient with Mary for not breaking away from such an impenitent husband, but to do so would have added further license to the addresses of men like Lord Lyttelton. She adhered with a persistence almost comic, in view of the facts, to her conventional right to be respected as Mrs. Robinson. Something yet lingered in her of a girl's romantic impulse to reform a rake ; for in spite of her innocence, she might easily have fallen in love with a rake before her marriage and have wedded him under a similar delusion to that which still encouraged her to think that Tom could be won from his vices. The question had not arisen over Tom when he had insinuated himself into an engagement. She had not liked him, and so had not stopped to weigh his qualifications. Now she was his wife, and the number of his infidelities (she discovered fresh instances of them in the prison, and ridiculed his denials until they were succeeded by a silence of admission) added a touch almost of malice to the resolution which she had formed, that she would win him back. Other women could afford to abandon him ; it was the nature of their bargain. In remaining loyal to him herself and in ignoring in public all admission of his faults, she marked an appreciable distinction between herself and the degraded women with whom he associated.

So far from retiring to that cottage "not idly gay but elegantly neat" of which she wrote in her poem, Mary lost little time after their release from prison before she reappeared at Vauxhall. The gay liberty of

the place appealed to her with redoubled force after her long period of seclusion. The lamps and the music were delightfully refreshing in exchange for the darkness and the uproar of the prison. Whatever misgivings she may have felt as to the reception that would be accorded to her by old acquaintances were soon dissipated, for past misfortune was never allowed to disturb the serenity of gossip in a pleasure garden. Nearly everybody knew that the Robinsons had only just been released, but the circumstance was regarded as a private matter which should in no way be suffered to mar the conviviality of the moment. Lord Lyttelton could not refrain however from a mischievous allusion. "In spite of all that has passed," said he, staring critically at Mary, "you are handsomer than ever." The compliment was no more lost upon her than the insult. She made no reply. If her beauty was unimpaired (and she was ready enough to take the word of a libertine for that), why should she not believe in the integrity of her talents? Already the air of Vauxhall Gardens had breathed new life into her starving ambitions. It was on the rock of her beauty that happiness had already split. She thought again of the stage. Tom would never make any money, and from the repeated refusals of his father to aid him it was clear that he would never be free from embarrassment. How misguided had been her mother's dissuasion from the dramatic career! Not only the applause of multitudes but also decent competence might by now have been hers if she had been allowed to follow the bent of her inclinations. But was it too late? She fancied she could hear the comments of Mr. Harris on the subject. Of course he would say she ought to take

to dressmaking or some trade. But she did not know how to make dresses, and had no opportunity of being initiated into any trade, whereas she could recite her lines well. Had not Mr. Garrick said so?

But what of the perils to which a stage life would expose her? A couple of years ago she had not realised what was meant by those who dwelt so heavily on this argument. Now she knew. But how had she come by this knowledge? Not on the stage, not in courting public attention in the glamour of assumed characters, but as a private person condemned by the hazard of circumstance to expose her beauty to the merciless calculations of the cynic and the macaroni. Acting was not an idle recreation. Garrick had taught her that. But what was to become of Maria if her whole time went in rehearsals and the learning of parts? She turned sick at the reflexion, which, like some sudden pain that usurps the whole attention, rapt her from all thought of herself. Gradually however the very thought of Maria led her back to her conviction that in the stage and in the stage alone lay for her the possible rescue from a desperate situation. She must make money, she must work for her child, and the obvious way in which to do her duty was to use the gifts that God had given her and turn them to practical advantage. Before, it had been a matter of lofty aspiration; now (and herein lay the surprise of the discovery) it was a matter of urgent necessity that she should go on the stage. When aspiration and necessity pull together, how can doubt subsist? Shrouded from the base scrutiny of personal admiration in the disguise of such rôles as she assumed, she would escape the persecution of men like Lyttelton. As "Mary Robinson" she

would cease to exist for the public. Her honour would be safe in making her beauty do service for the embodiment of imaginary characters in an imaginary world. She needed some such screen as publicity would hold up, to hide from her the painful contemplation of her own life. The more she could subordinate the memory of past sufferings to the absorbing preoccupation of making a character live, the better she would be pleased, the lighter would be the burden of the days to come.

It was with thoughts like these in her head that as she walked with Tom in St. James's Park in the late autumn of 1776 they were greeted by Mr. Brereton of Drury Lane Theatre. The actor gladly consented to dine at Lyne's, the confectioner in Old Bond Street over whose shop the Robinsons were temporarily lodged. Mary had not forgotten his stories about Mrs. Abington, and she now plied him with many questions as to her own chances of success. Brereton was warm in his encouragement, and, urged by her entreaties to an expression of candour, declared not only that she had the voice and the dramatic instinct but also the figure and the "marking eye" for the stage. Beauty, he said, was not enough. More than half the beauties in England would cut a sorry figure on any stage. The body must take certain lines easily, and as he spoke he struck attitudes to denote his meaning. Mary listened and looked with rapt attention. It was as if the veil of her childhood's illusion hung once more before her eyes in all its enticing lustre. The enchanted hours with Garrick were made nearer in remembrance by the discourse of Brereton. All that had happened between was oblivion, the nothingness of actual experience that

has failed to enrich the individual and so fades into the untenanted darkness of a lumber room upon which the key is turned for ever.

When next Mr. Brereton visited the Robinsons, they had moved into apartments in Newman Street. Mary was again with child. The appearance of a stranger with Mr. Brereton disconcerted her, but the mixture of sweetness and gravity in his address soon disarmed her of all self-consciousness. This was Mr. Sheridan, the talented author of "*The Rivals*," who had recently bought a share of Drury Lane Theatre. He was then twenty-six years of age, and gave an impression of one whom Fame had marked out for a companion before he himself was aware of her intentions. Others might carve a way industriously into her favour. Sheridan followed the star of his own temperament, and asked for no happier guide. The charm of his personality was swiftly felt by Mary, but when she asked herself wherein it lay she was unable to explain it. From the moment of his introduction he had watched her closely until he took his leave. She had been sensible too that she was under observation, but it was the observation of one assuming the presence of virtues wherever he looked, and undisturbed, even edified in a way by the vices which did not escape him in his excursions into the depths and shallows of human nature. No regular beauty of feature distinguished that lovable face, but in the cold clear depths of those sanguine brown eyes lay an unfathomable well of high spirits and the joy of life. When he asked Mary to recite for him, it was with the air of one expecting pleasure. At first she was nervous and spoke her lines coldly enough, but he waited patiently for a felicity of tone which he knew must come, and then

expressed by a rapid look at Brereton his appreciation. The impersonality of his praise stimulated her to a more reckless exercise of her powers. If he had doubted before (and his manner entirely disarmed all suspicion of such a doubt) he was articulately certain now. At his request she passed from Cordelia to Juliet, taking the scenes with Romeo in the Second Act. Mr. Brereton recited Romeo and she followed, while Mr. Sheridan stood at some distance gazing steadily into the air as he listened to the familiar music of the lines. At the close of a scene, so absorbed is he in the play, that at Juliet's "good-night" he snatches the rôle from Brereton and cries :

Sleep dwell upon thine eyes, peace in thy breast—
Would I were sleep and peace.

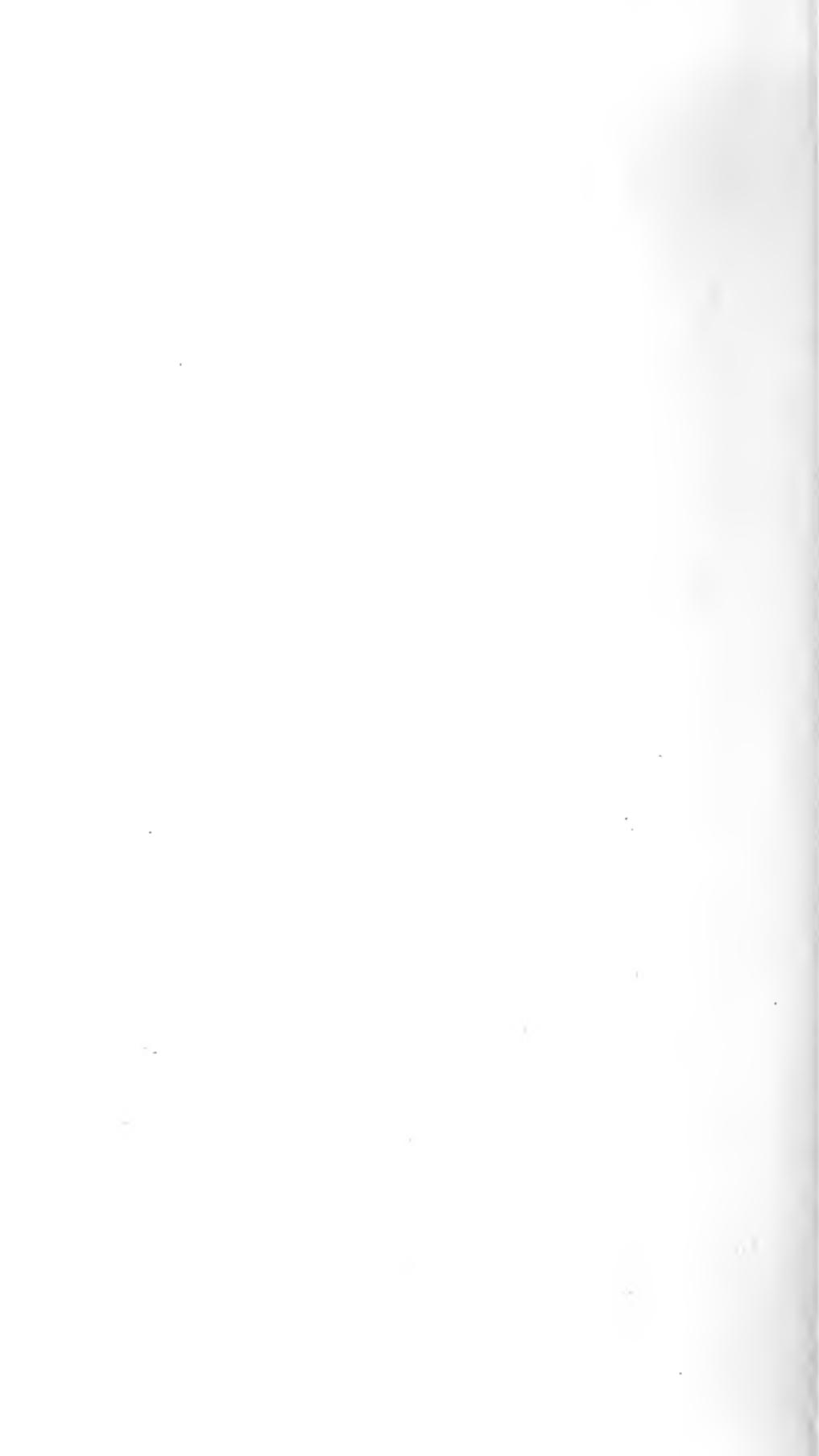
Brereton's laugh recalls them to earth, and the improvised rehearsal ends in merriment.

Sheridan came again to hear her in the tragic parts of the play, but less to criticise than to encourage her. With her permission an appointment is made in the Green Room of Drury Lane Theatre, when the principal scenes are rehearsed in the presence of Mr. Garrick, who is agreeably surprised at this occasion for renewing acquaintance with his old pupil. But a few months have passed since the memorable night on which he himself has said farewell to the stage. Mr. Brereton again recites Romeo, and Tom and Mr. Sheridan wait eagerly to hear the comments of the great actor. Garrick is all for Mary making her appearance as Juliet. With a glance of comic envy at Brereton he sighs at the passing of the years ; "I grow more and more like Lear and less and less like Romeo,"



From a photograph of the picture by George Romney.

R. BRINSLEY SHERIDAN AND MRS. ROBINSON.



he cries, "but if the music of a voice could put new blood into these veins, Mrs. Robinson would do it." He offers to train her for the part, and presents her with a copy of his own version of the play.

As they leave the theatre, Tom wonders how much his wife may be expected to earn in her new profession ; but Mary scarcely hears his questions as to the particulars of the arrangement to be concluded. Her mind still clings to the scene she has left, and the passion of Shakespeare's music lingers in her ears as she walks rapidly through the cold streets in the gloomy twilight of an advancing November evening. At last she is to come into her legitimate inheritance, at last she has been able to silence the "I dare not" that has waited on her "I would" since the day in Bristol when she saw Mr. Powel in "King Lear." Fortune has not deserted her through all her misfortunes. She stands now on the threshold of the door to fame, and already the clamour of public applause sings in her ears. As she enters her apartment, the little Maria crows from her basket at the sound of her approach. She catches up the child, and all the mother rushes into her eyes as she kisses it again and again. Suddenly she turns as if she has been caught unawares in a secret action. In the confusion of her brain she imagines that the tender lovable eyes of Sheridan are witnesses of her emotion. The room is dark save for the uncertain light cast from the fireplace. But as suddenly the illusion vanishes and she recognises the figure of Tom in the open doorway.

XVI

By a quarter past six on Tuesday evening, the tenth of December, seventeen hundred and seventy-six, every seat in Drury Lane Theatre was filled, the curtain rising punctually on the quarrel between Capulet and Montagu. In addition to the attractions regularly provided in "Selima and Azor," a masquerade introduced into the first act, and "The Funeral Procession," upon which the curtain was to rise in the last act, the play bills announced that the part of Juliet would be taken by "a young lady, being her first appearance upon any stage." The music, the scenes, and the dresses were entirely new for the occasion.

From Garrick's version of the play it is easy enough to see the light by which he read Shakespeare for stage purposes. His first care was to quicken the action of the story ; the thing must be made to move more swiftly. Away with scenes of comic relief, away with long speeches, however beautiful the poetry, unless they are sustained by a passionate situation or carry the spectator into new phases of the plot, away with anything anywhere that is obscure. Transpose scenes where by so doing the course of the story is straightened. If necessary add a scene. But as a rule no more than a few lines need be interpolated to round off the rough edges left in the processes of compression or redistribution. Shakespeare himself would most likely have found

no fault with Garrick for taking such liberties, although he might have condemned many an instance in which the liberty had turned into an unjustifiable license. He used other people's material freely for his own purposes, and would have seen no reason why his works should not be handled with equal freedom by other persons to serve their ends. By Garrick's shifts and economies, the play of "Romeo and Juliet" is strained to a pitch of exaggerated intensity. The passionate issues sweep before the spectator at a violent pace: and the speed of the adapter's vision, which concentrates itself upon the obvious aspect of the play to the exclusion of nearly all others, carries him to a conclusion entailing considerable outrage on the text, which in the rest of the version (except for the omissions and an occasional line) remains as Shakespeare wrote it. Most reverently Garrick felt about the character of Juliet, for it is the least touched of all in his version.

Brereton depicted the Romeo of his period, an English Romeo of the eighteenth century in powder and frills, as gloriously free from all thought of what the Veronese lover of the thirteenth century may have resembled as the Elizabethan Romeo in a slashed doublet of Shakespeare's own day. He took his part a little boisterously, allowing the passion to break out in spasms that rent the fine fabric of the lines here and there to tatters.

And Mary? Now that the moment of realisation is upon her, how does she bear herself? The play was full of allusions to her own life, and in rehearsing her part with Mr. Garrick it had seemed that her personal sorrows were being melted in the red-hot crucible of the actor's enthusiasm. He had repeatedly gone through the whole part of Romeo with her, and

she wished again and again that he could have appeared in the stead of Mr. Brereton. At every turn in the play a line or even a word had recalled experiences of her own. Was Juliet scarce fourteen? Mary was not much more than a year older when she married. Was Lady Capulet importunate in impressing her daughter with the duty of marriage? Mrs. Darby had not been less so. Now that life had inflicted on her the pain and the bitterness of a loveless marriage, all that Mary had dreamed of love came as it were from the dark chamber in which her troubled fancy had groped, into the open daylight of articulation in the scenes with Romeo. The custom of the stage had not yet dulled her sensibility to the overwhelming confluence of the real with the mimic life. Her nerves tingled under the fusion of her own sorrows with the joys of Juliet as the play opened. This was no rehearsal but the night itself, and to Mary in the first throes of her experience as an actress it seemed as if the veil between the counterfeit and the real must fall away in the actuality of her appearing on the stage of Drury Lane Theatre.

She stands waiting in the side wing in her dress of pink satin trimmed with silver-spangled crape, her head ornamented with white feathers. At a few paces distant, Lady Capulet is asking the nurse after her daughter, and the garrulous old woman flutters about the stage crying after her charge, calling her "lamb" and "ladybird." Suddenly she runs off to fetch her. Mary's moment has come. She is trembling violently and leans almost fainting on the nurse's arm, while it seems to her as she is borne on the stage that the voice of Mr. Sheridan, who had

been by her side, is sounding in her ears. At the same moment a tempest of applause shakes the building from one end to the other. Luckily Juliet has little to say in her first scene, and the confusion of her manner may well be mistaken by the audience for the shy reluctance with which she hears Lady Capulet's proposition for her marriage. In the masquerade she recovers her self-possession and dares to look away from the stage into the deep cavern of faces before her. For a moment her eyes encounter those of Mr. Garrick, who sits in the orchestra closely watching the performance. But now the revellers bid Capulet good-night. Soon the front of the stage is empty but for the nurse and Juliet. Silently Juliet watches the figures disappear, almost like one in a trance. Suddenly she starts and calls the nurse, asking her to name first two gentlemen who mean nothing to her. The artifice is perceptible in the breathless haste with which, without heeding the nurse's replies, she makes enquiry of him that would not dance. At sound of the name Romeo she startles the house with an outburst of tragic violence. The scared nurse mumbles "What's this?" Some one from another chamber calls "Juliet!" and as she goes off, the curtain falls slowly and Mary is met by a chorus of congratulation from her friends in the wing of the scene, while the buzz of conversation in the audience reaches her where she stands, rising to a queer impersonal roar and then subsiding almost into silence.

In the second act the critics had an opportunity of measuring the modulations of the new Juliet's voice as she sighs and swoons her way through the rapturous converse with Romeo. Sometimes the intonation sounds

artificial, but the voice is as silvery as Garrick thought it, and to make up for the stiffness in the highly pitched passages, the artless inspiration of the simpler short sentences, the girlish abandonment in their utterance, the involuntary grace of her impersonation, compel homage even from the sternest spectator. Maybe it was the youth in Mary that made her Juliet so winning, but it was not the youth of mere years: rather an indefatigable elasticity of spirits, a sort of Arcadian juvenility that communicates itself to others with mysterious rapidity. Many an aged gentleman in the pit that night wished, nay felt himself a Romeo as the play progressed. A few lines of Shakespeare well said will cause one to forget his baldness, another his grey hairs, so the talk be of nightingales and larks and youthful lovers; and again, where it is of withered oaks and the storms of a spent life, who can hear the lines and not grow older in the hearing? You may make old men of boys in an afternoon by making them listen to a speech of Lear in the mouth of a master; and on this night many an aged citizen of London in the pit of Old Drury Lane Theatre forgot his business and his domesticities, and his substantial superiorities to the impecunious man of fashion, and fancied himself a very Romeo as he listened with almost proprietary reverence to the flute-like softness of Mrs. Robinson's voice. Her power of alternating between tragic despair and the careless lyricism of sustained passion revealed itself to a surprised audience, in the third act, when in her frenzied colloquy with the nurse she mistakes the death of Tybalt for that of Romeo himself. As she played with increasing confidence the applause grew more frequent, nerving

her to the exercise of fresh efforts. The awe with which that cavern of faces had inspired her when first she suffered her eyes to travel in its direction gave place, as the evening wore on, to a sense of almost defiant indifference. It was as if her conception of the whole art of acting had been violently enlarged under the pressure of a single experience, and an almost contemptuous sense of triumph possessed her as she spoke the lines in the fourth act before she drank the potion. Instead of stabbing herself and falling on Romeo's corpse in the fifth act in the traditional way of concluding the part, Mary Robinson rushed in a frenzy from the body of her lover and killed herself on the opposite side of the stage. The innovation was not a success, but the whole of this closing scene was so deformed in the acting version, that nothing could save it from condemnation ; and the critics, no more discriminating in those days than in our own, spoke slightly of the actress's attempts to represent pathos by whispers and passion by ranting, whereas the fault lay in the mutilation of the play with its ludicrously theatrical consequences. Not that the audience minded, for by this time they were in such spirits at the whole performance that it would have been difficult indeed to check the flow of their applause. As the curtain fell on the last act, the footmen in the gallery cheered, the ladies beat the ledges of the boxes with their fans. Mr. Garrick left the orchestra to go on the stage and congratulate his pupil. She was already the centre of a group of ladies and gentlemen who were vying one with the other in paying her compliments. Some were members of the profession, some critics for the daily newspapers.

Mary stood in their midst, radiant in the suit of white satin with its long gauze veil which she had assumed for the final scene. She scarcely heard the remarks that were addressed to her. It was all a tumult of voices and rapidly passing figures. Hurried exchange of opinion between critics reached her ears. "A genteel figure!" "Ay, and her features when properly animated are striking." "The voice of a nightingale." "Genius in the rough. She is too unfamiliar with the stage."

Mary wondered that they could be so eager in discussing the performance now that it was over. Soon they were gone, each to his tavern to finish writing his notice of the play. Suddenly she found herself alone, and the sense of her solitude came upon her with increased force for the rapidity with which the crowd about her had melted out of sight. The gloom of the churchyard scene was upon her, and the sound of voices and the cries of the linkboys and the turmoil of carriages outside the theatre came to her in a confused roar as if the whole of London were astir with the feuds of Capulet and Montagu. Through an eyehole in the drawn curtain she peered into the empty house with its rows and rows of tenantless seats alive but a few moments before with the enthusiastic gestures of men and women, now silent as the tomb of Capulet itself. She knew that a few paces from her was the Green Room ; that she had only to enter it, once more to be a centre of applause ; but she felt an elevation in her solitude, an exalted detachment from the trivialities of the occasion. All this commotion was concerned with her achievement. Its extent could best be measured, its full flavour best

be tasted by loitering in this strange seclusion so near the turbulent regions of adulation, so remote in its tranquillity, in its air of a place in which great things have happened and are all over.

As she moved noiselessly about the stage, running her hand along the ledge of Capulet's tomb as if to assure herself of its substantial existence, she fancied she heard a voice cry "Mrs. Robinson!" and turning in the direction of the sound, descried Mr. Sheridan evidently in the act of seeking her. She hastened to confront him. He was alone. As soon as he beheld her he stopped short in his rapid passage across the stage and looked round with an air of comical satisfaction at the scene in which she was discovered, as if to make himself acquainted with the frame of her mind now that he had come thus unexpectedly upon her.

"Mrs. Robinson, they are calling for you in the Green Room," said he. "The festival is incomplete indeed without its Juliet. I did not think to find you wandering amongst these paper tombs. And yet perhaps the crowd is no company for you. You have done nobly! Garrick is delighted. I can find no words in which to express to you my satisfaction. And this is only the beginning. The star of your fame has but peeped from the rim of the horizon, and yet how the point sparkles already! But I have disturbed you. Such moments as that in which I found you are precious. Let me withdraw and announce to the others that you will soon be with them."

"Oh no, Mr. Sheridan, I beg you will not go!" said Mary, while her heart was beating strangely under the excitement of this unexpected encounter. "I hope your kindness towards me, your belief in my

talents, has not been misplaced. Your esteem is valuable, far more valuable than the applause of the people in the playhouse. I scarce know what I am saying," she faltered. "I cannot express what I feel."

"These sentiments do honour to you, Madam," said Sheridan, "and if you are moved beyond the power of expression in these surroundings it is no unnatural tribute to the associations of this theatre. For more than a century it has been the home of great actors and great actresses. I like to fancy a meeting of the men and women whose illustrious names shine down the long roll of years—honest Betterton ; the lovely Bracegirdle and poor Mountford, pinked through the heart for her sake ; wonderful Anne Oldfield flashing humour from those small hard eyes ; portentous Booth. Perhaps their ghosts do haunt this place when all the city is asleep and even the players are gone home to bed. The spirits of other Juliets hover about this scene. The lustre of your fame, Mrs. Robinson, shall shine no more dimly for their neighbourhood. But so long as we stay here the ghosts are too shy to come out and discuss the new Juliet. Lend me your arm and let us quit the churchyard for the supper table."

The sound of laughter and the ring of glasses reached them as he spoke. Mary never felt prouder than when she appeared in the doorway of the Green Room leaning on Mr. Sheridan's arm.

"A toast, a toast!" cried he, looking down the table at the gay company of men and women who stopped the flow of their conversation and laughter to listen to him. "The new Juliet! Mrs. Robinson!" All eyes turned to where she stood, a conspicuous figure

even amid that company in her white satin gown with the chain of beads at her waist supporting a massive cross. She looked like some dainty figure in white porcelain from the potteries of Meissen. Mr. Garrick now rose from the table, and with the old actor on one side and the young author on the other, she was dragged to the head of the table.

“Mrs. Robinson between the Muses of Tragedy and Comedy!” cried Sheridan, in allusion to the picture of Garrick by Reynolds painted fifteen years before. The jest was hailed with shouts of laughter and huzzas. Soon Mary was eating a slice of fat capon and drinking red punch. Mr. Sheridan introduces his young wife. It is late before the company disperses, and the courts and the taverns round old Drury are silent, as Mary, wrapped in a flowing mantle and closely hooded, steps into a hackney coach to which Mr. Sheridan has conducted her, and drives to Newman Street with the stars blinking at her from a clear cold sky through the open window of the coach and her cheeks tingling with the wintry air of mid-December before sunrise.

XVII

MRS. DARBY was resigned rather than reconciled to the sudden change in her daughter's life, nor did an encouraging letter from the Duchess of Devonshire dispel those anxieties with which she was beset. The public flattery of persons like Mr. Sheridan and Mr. Garrick was alluring, but the distractions of a theatrical career alarmed and disconcerted her. She rarely accompanied her daughter to the theatre, and she occupied herself closely with the little Maria. As an amusement the play had always attracted her, as a profession she viewed it with all the more mistrust for being unable to look at it as an intelligible occupation. Messages came at all hours of the day from the theatre, Mary was subjected to all the inconveniences of sudden rehearsals, irregular meals, the stress of difficult relations with a number of people with all of whom it was as necessary as it was difficult to keep on good terms for her own success. Mrs. Darby felt incapable of keeping abreast with the numerous situations, trifling as they were, presented by each day's business. For her, it was as if she had followed Mary from the days of her childhood with breathless anxiety in a chase that did not admit of the attention being relaxed for a single moment until—behold ! the girl had disappeared round a dark corner, and before the pursuer could come up with her again, a veil had dropped between

her and the fugitive whom she saw now dimly, disporting herself in an alien world in which everybody seemed to be in a perpetual hurry and the passage from one day's business to another was a precarious bridge of imminent disasters. What was the poor lady to make of a profession which persuaded her daughter, so soon before she was again expecting to be a mother, to pass rapidly from the impersonation of a humorous young wife of her own period teaching a merry lesson to a foolish husband, to that of an outraged Persian queen in a picturesque costume of blue and white, her figure devoid of hoop, her head of powder, and her feet bound by sandals richly ornamented with Oriental designs? And before Mary's startled mother can realise what a mine of unexplored emotional resources has been disclosed by the assumption of two such different rôles, Mary is back again in the comedy of her own day, reflecting some of her own experience and playing a young wife doomed to keep her marriage secret and suffer the addresses of both an uncle and a nephew until a conspiracy of comic circumstances forces upon her the disclosure of her husband.

Mr. Sheridan was enchanted with her. Had she not saved the fate of his "Trip to Scarborough" when the progress of the play was arrested by the indignation of an audience who recognised in it an adaptation of Sir John Vanbrugh's "The Relapse," and thought themselves cheated by the promise of a new play? Pit and gallery had hissed Mrs. Yates off the stage. Mary stood alone facing the fury of the house. "Do not yield an inch, Mrs. Robinson!" cried Sheridan from the wings; and from his place in the stage box, "'Tis not you, but the play they hiss!" shouted the

Duke of Cumberland. Mary turned towards the King's brother and curtsied. The grace of her action, the unexpected source of comedy provided in it, disarmed the popular indignation, and the players, quick to grasp the slightest modulation in the mood of an audience, continued their parts without further interruption.

The production of the "School for Scandal" was now settled upon, and the author was anxious to secure the services of Mrs. Robinson ; but to Mrs. Darby's relief, her daughter refused the offer, for to accept it would have been precarious in her present condition.

When Sheridan next visited her it was with the blush of his new fame full upon him. His comedy had been hailed as a masterpiece, and the eighth of May, little more than six months after he entered upon the management of Drury Lane Theatre, was a date that shone with steady brilliance throughout his life in the calendar of his memory. On visiting Mrs. Robinson he found her in consternation ; her child, but six weeks old, lay dying on her lap. The artless sympathy of his manner endeared him more than ever to this unhappy mother. When he had left her, she thought with more than usual bitterness of Tom's infidelities. Was it wrong, dangerous, to draw consolation from her sentiments on Mr. Sheridan ? He was adorable. She dared not think into what perplexity she might be thrown if the steady ray of his chivalry were to burst into the flame of passion. His position as manager of the theatre invested him with that large freedom in her company necessitated by perpetual affairs of business in which the ceremonial of life had to yield to the importunities of the situation. Yet he never took advantage of this

unchallenged freedom to humiliate her by reference to her unhappy domestic plight. Only by the increased sensibility of his manner did he show that he was aware of it.

Soon after his departure the little Sophia died. Her grief came to her in a cloud. But a few months ago she had stabbed herself as Juliet, and the dagger of jealous Roxana, her rival in Alexander's love, had pierced her heart in the fabled gardens of Semiramis. Now her child lay dead in her new apartments in Southampton Street, Covent Garden. Her mother said bitter things about the playhouse, but to Mary the playhouse seemed to be the only refuge from the miseries of her life. It enabled her to bear with more fortitude the misfortune of being a neglected wife, to play upon the stage the part of a neglected wife. There were other ways of confronting unhappiness than by meek resignation. Of course her mother would never understand, but Mary would not suffer her talent as well as her domestic peace to be sacrificed to the consequences of a loveless marriage. At present she needs rest before she begins to study fresh parts, and with the permission of Mr. Sheridan she visits Bath. From Bath she is drawn once again to Bristol by that melancholy love of her birthplace that always found expression in solitary walks in the cloisters of the cathedral. But she is restless, and longs again for the distraction of the stage. At Sheridan's advice (as soon as she returned to London he came to see her in her lodgings in Leicester Square) she undertakes to play through the summer at the Haymarket Theatre; but the contract is a dead letter, for the manager slighted her in deference to the claims of Miss Farren, with whom

he cannot afford to quarrel, and so Mary refuses to appear. She is quick to exhibit the caprices as well as the charms of a theatrical star in the ascendant, and takes a salary throughout the summer without once showing herself on the boards of the Haymarket. Mrs. Abington herself could not have shown more temper on the occasion.

But in the autumn of the year she is once more at Drury Lane, going mad as Ophelia, wishing her eyes basilisks to strike Gloucester dead as Lady Anne in "*King Richard III.*," unfolding the "sage and serious doctrine of virginity" as *The Lady* in Milton's "*Comus*." The success with which she impersonates this ethereal figure clad in the complete steel of chastity adds zest to the pursuit of her admirers. For she is now a public personage who must pay the penalties of notoriety. Men fight a passage to her acquaintance. Milliners and mantua makers besiege her with obscure messages designed to compromise her. She laughs her way through every artifice, rejoicing in the exercise of her wit, for when once the functions of nature become a source of merriment, there is no longer cause to look upon the ground and hang the head. A year on the stage has hardened her address. Lord Lyttelton himself has to admit that there is more in her than he had supposed, comforting himself for his repulse by the reflexion that she is now a public actress and that her beauty (like the lamps at Vauxhall) is lighted up every evening to provide any and every man with a delightful spectacle.

But the fitful gusts of passion in the Macaronies who frequent the theatre exercise but little effect upon Mary. It needs but this revelation of human



From an engraving by Thornthwaite, after a drawing by F. Roberts.
MRS. ROBINSON IN THE CHARACTER OF AMANDA, IN SHERIDAN'S
"A TRIP TO SCARBOROUGH."

nature in its grotesque antics on such a generous scale to confirm her in her aversion from intrigue. For what were all these lovers to the woman of an incurable sensibility? She was no Mrs. Abington; neither by birth nor by election was she the natural associate of cynics or men of the world. Such hardness as she acquired was a thin layer set by experience upon the unfathomable depths of her romantic nature. Whether it was a Queensberry, a Rutland or a Pembroke who insulted her by his offers of protection, what chance had he so long as she had reason to suspect his infatuation at its source? Had she not paid by her marriage the full price of an alliance devoid of sensibility? She would have gone to Botany Bay for Mr. Sheridan had he asked her. No marriage vow would have stopped her. It was the degrading character of Tom's associates rather than the fact of his infidelities that disgusted her. In the meanwhile her success becomes more and more assured as an actress.

In January 1778 she is "The Runaway" Emily, a girl seeking refuge from a tyrannical uncle, with cherry-coloured cheeks and eyes that, in the words of a malicious rival in the play, from their want of expression might be taken for glass. The scene is a country house, and the talk is a babble of domesticity and the virtues. A few months later she is one of two wives, hard, brilliant, fashionable to a fault, each delighting that the other is an object of her husband's infidelity; both employing their joint resources to extract money from the tyrants. This time it is the town and the vices in lieu of the country and the virtues. Next come the swelling passions of Anthony's outraged wife,

the calm, dignified Roman matron with her two little boys pleading for their father's return. She has brought them all the way to Alexandria, even into the torrid zone of Cleopatra's passion for her husband, and soon the two women are face to face in a scene of recriminations. But Octavia sounds the high note of dignity throughout, and surrenders Anthony once more rather than share his love with Cleopatra.

From Octavia, Mary passed, a week later, to Lady Macbeth and a trifling operetta called "The Lucky Escape," for which she herself wrote the verses. The tragedy overweights her, and the critics for once agree : Vaulting ambition has o'erleaped itself. She recovers their favour before long by reappearing as Juliet. Tom all this time is in high feather, for his wife's salary enables him once more to cut a figure, and Mary is as prodigal in parting with her money as her husband is incapable of making any. Soon however the demands of his bond creditors exhaust the total sums due to his wife from her benefit performances.

"What are we to do?" she asked her husband coolly. "'Tis long since I have taken you seriously, but you take my money so seriously that soon I fear we shall be invited once more within the walls of a prison. This time I shall not accompany you. Could you not ask Lord Lyttelton to give you a post as steward of Hagley?"

Tom disliked the allusion to Lyttelton ; he disliked the subject altogether, and bit his lips in vexation as she spoke.

"You must come again to Tregunter," said he. "Now you are famous, they will be highly flattered by the visit. You know if my father gives me any

money it is yours. I am a poor hand at making it myself."

"But a skilled hand at spending it."

"I wish I had your talent for acting. Upon my soul, Madam, you are hard on me."

She looked contemptuously at him.

"You want me to win a passage for you into Mr. Harris's purse?" she asked.

He laughed uneasily. "Why, Mary, you know you could persuade him. You have a way——"

She did not allow him to proceed any further. If he wished it, she would accompany him to Tregunter. Not that she anticipated any practical results from the visit, but she was herself curious to know what kind of a welcome would be extended to her now that she was independent of Mr. Harris's generosity. So once more they took the long journey, but with very different feelings from those with which they had last proceeded on their visit to Wales. If her own experiences in life had helped her to interpret her parts on the stage with vivacity and verisimilitude, those parts now contributed to aid her in the conduct of her private life. It was not for nothing that she had entered into the spirit of Vanbrugh's Araminta, and delighted the ladies and gentleman in the boxes with her caustic repartees and her calculating schemes for the discomfiture of Moneytrap, Araminta's husband. She could scarcely have shown more spirit in a first night's performance than she did on the occasion of this third visit to Mr. Harris. After all, what were these people to her? She was visiting them to do her husband a service which might be to her own advantage. She liked to imagine herself as cold in performing this

operation as the penniless spendthrift noblemen who racked their brains to entrap the daughters of rich citizens into an alliance with their titles in the plays which were so popular at Drury Lane Theatre. But the truth was, she looked forward with some malice to humiliating those who had humiliated her. Not that it needed words for this. Looks and, above all, clothes in that rural district sufficed. She took enough and saw that their fashion was marked enough to exercise the patience of Mrs. Molly and Miss Betsy to its limits. From their faces alone could Mary guess what they suffered, for Mr. Harris was now established in Tregunter House, and to express surprise at anything, however fashionable, would have been to discredit the reputation which was hoped from the splendour of that mansion. The critical attitude of the Tregunter ladies could only be conveyed therefore in constant appeals to Mrs. Robinson as the very oracle of taste, and in the assumption of an ignorance which was somehow made to suggest that in such matters it might well be folly to be wise. It was impossible to suppose that Miss Robinson could approve the dramatic life, but Mary took some delight in drawing her into an admission that one could not afford to be too nice where the necessity of earning a livelihood was concerned.

As for Mr. Harris, he was far too cunning to allow what he was thinking to rise to the surface of his conversation. By his manner he conveyed a sort of patronising approval, as if in becoming an actress his daughter-in-law had been acting under his guidance. Necessity was a stern master but it taught many a valuable lesson. The compliments and the wide eyes of the neighbours when Mary went among them were

taken by Mr. Harris as evidence of the increased importance conferred upon himself by his close association with a distinguished actress. But Mary put reins on his satisfaction by addressing many awkward questions to him with an air that would not be denied and could not be accepted as welcome, without reflecting awkwardly upon her host's character as a justice of the peace. Certain that the secret view of her morals must be unfavourable, she deliberately sprinkled a few grains of license in her conversation, and the fashionable languor of her articulation added exasperation to the anxiety and misgiving of the ladies at the dangers of her captivity.

Their relief was considerable when at the end of a fortnight the Robinsons took leave of Tregunter.

XVIII

ON their way home they stopped in Bath, where they fell in with a gentleman to whom Tom had long ago given a promissory note in lieu of payment of a considerable sum of money. His amiable manners and the authority with which he retailed the scandals of Bath made him an entertaining companion. His father-in-law, as Master of the Ceremonies, occupied a post of fashionable distinction and exercised powers over the social life of the watering-place that lent a peculiar charm to his existence. His son-in-law was a creditable addition to the family, being as ready to make love to any woman worth the attempt and fight a duel on her behalf as could be desired, even at the headquarters of gallantry in Bath. Mary repelled his advances until she found it expedient to escape to Bristol, but she had not been there more than a day, when Tom was arrested at the suit of his gay creditor, who himself waited in an upper room of the inn to see the writ executed, and as soon as he was satisfied that Tom was in the hands of the sheriff's officer, sent a request, as if from a lady, for a few minutes' conversation with his wife. Mary followed the waiter who brought the message into an adjoining room—where she was confronted with Tom's friend. The impudence of his demeanour did not frighten her. She knew that he was about to invite her surrender

as the price of her husband's liberty, and she laughed to herself at the eternal repetition of these infamous proposals.

"Well, Madam," said the gentleman, smiling sarcastically at her, "you have involved your husband in a pretty embarrassment. Had you been less severe towards me, not only this paltry debt would have been cancelled, but any sum that I could command would have been at his service. He has now either to pay me, to fight me, or to go to a prison ; and all because you treat me with such unexampled rigour."

"I entreat you to reflect," said Mary with an air of assumed distress, "before you drive me to distraction."

"I have reflected," said he, "and I find that you possess the power to do with me what you will. Promise to return to Bath—to behave more kindly—and I will at once discharge your husband."

She found little difficulty in bursting into tears.

"Monster!" cried she, "no human being could propose such terms!"

The gentleman made preparations to take his departure. He rang the bell and ordered the waiter to call his carriage.

As soon as the man had gone on his errand : "Release my husband," cried Mary. "For heaven's sake do not provoke me further."

The door was open ; her persecutor was on his way out, when she nimbly intercepted his passage and stood in the doorway, swaying her body as if in an agony of doubt and despair.

"I will return to Bath," she cried in a voice of carefully modulated passion ; and then, as he started

at the unexpected announcement—"but it shall be to expose your dishonourable, your barbarous machinations. Your innocent wife shall learn your treachery. Your father-in-law shall lament the day he consented to call you son. The whole world shall know that the common acts of seduction are not sufficiently depraved for the mind of such a libertine and gamester as you."

"You mistake me, Madam," said he in some alarm, for her voice had sounded with tragic fury into the passages of the inn. "You must forgive the indiscretions into which my passion may have betrayed me. I had no wish to insult you in your misfortune. But you can have no reason for remaining with your faithless husband. By his conduct he proves that he does not love you. By mine I hope to prove——"

She looked up at him through her tears which she had suffered to fall in silence throughout his speech. He thought her softened towards him.

"There, Madam," said he, drawing a paper from his bosom, "there is your husband's release. I rely on your generosity. We meet again in Bath."

Mary took the paper swiftly and looked at him with an admirable counterfeit of gratitude in her eyes. The waiter had announced the carriage, and from the window of the room in which they had been talking Mary watched her dupe drive from the inn door. Then, laughing bitterly at her own skill, she hastened to her husband with the discharge.

But although the success of her artifice pleased her, she longed again for the stage, where she could honestly enter into the joys and the sorrows of an imagined world without degrading her profession by employing

its resources in guarding her private life from insult. Soon she was back in London eagerly rehearsing the part of Palmira in "Mahomet." Monsieur Voltaire was just dead, and the public was to be regaled with the big-mouthed rhetoric of his tragic muse in English dress: Palmira, the disciple of Mahomet, has been wrested from the Prophet by Alcanor, who champions the old faith of Mecca against the new comer. Palmira is in love with Zaphna. Both are the children of Alcanor, who is as unwitting of the relationship as they. Mahomet, to silence the opposition of Alcanor, bids Zaphna slay his father, and in return for the deed promises him Palmira. Incest is thus to be the price of parricide. The Prophet covets Palmira for himself, but when her lover, whom she has since recognised as her brother, is poisoned, and she finds that she has helped to kill her father, she takes refuge in suicide.

Mary's eldest brother John Darby saw the curtain rise on this horrific tragedy with the utmost impatience. He had come from Italy to spend a few months in London, and was with great difficulty persuaded to overcome his reluctance to see his sister on the stage. But no sooner had Palmira appeared in her pasteboard Mecca, than he started from his seat in the stage box and rushed precipitately from the theatre. Had he stayed through the play his emotions must have put a term to his holiday and sent him flying back to his business in Leghorn. As it was, he vowed never again to attempt to overcome his abhorrence of his sister's profession, nor could Mrs. Darby find much to urge in excuse of her daughter's choice of such a career.

But the playgoers delighted in the tragedy of

“Mahomet”; it was sinister and splendid, and Mrs. Robinson looked mighty fine as the horror-stricken Palmira. She was loaded with compliments whenever she entered the Green Room. And what a company assembled each night in that corner of the theatre! The days had long passed since you could pay for a visit behind the scenes, but no door was shut to genius and good comradeship where Sheridan was in command. So you might see Earl Derby and young Mr. Fox disputing over the rival merits of Miss Farren and Mrs. Robinson. Mr. Fox was emphatic in his preference for Mrs. Robinson: Earl Derby smiled languidly at his vehemence. He was all for the other lady, whom he ultimately married. The battle over their beauty still rages with those who collect the pictures of that period. Another contemporary of Mary's who also was to be seen from time to time in the Green Room of Drury Lane Theatre was Priscilla Hopkins, her schoolfellow in Bristol, who married Mr. John Kemble the actor. Not only beauty but youth distinguished those gatherings, for no one of these ladies was above twenty at this time.

When she remembered that her twentieth birthday was still to come, Mary herself wondered that it had taken so little time to crowd her life with so many hazards and so many vicissitudes. Already she had been two years upon the stage; already she had acted a dozen different rôles. Every day brought her fresh acquaintances. She now hired a house in Covent Garden. It was thronged with visitors, and her morning levées became the rage of the fashionable. All the splendour and the folly that had characterised her manner of life in Hatton Garden were reproduced on

a scale of still more lavish proportions. Tom bought horses, a phaeton and ponies ; and Mary's taste for dress, encouraged by the exigencies of the different characters which she had assumed, ran riot in an immense variety of costumes which were seized upon by the milliners and mantua makers of the town as models for the fashionable world. Such time as she could spare from the business of the theatre was spent in the pleasures of society and the card table.

In spite of its auspicious opening, her dramatic career had been no leap into fame. Public opinion was apt to be fickle ; the critics were often supercilious ; competition was keen ; so was professional jealousy. But she had conquered a position, and never had she trodden earth so firmly as at the beginning of the year 1779. She had had to pass through many a dark passage of doubt and difficulty to reach her triumph, but it was no less sweet in realisation than it had been in anticipation. Tom had now come to represent something less tangible for her than the negro servant who had followed her through numerous changes of address and once more taken up his abode under her roof. But so long as there was the semblance of a husband in her neighbourhood, importunities were more easily checked ; and if Tom was a mere cypher in the domestic picture which she strove to preserve in the midst of all this splendour, her child was none the less a substantial factor in her existence : and the presence of even a merely nominal husband was useful to keep suitors at arm's length.

On the twenty-ninth of January Mr. Garrick died in the house where, five years before, Mary had recited her lines to him. Dr. Johnson helped to launch the actor's

fame into eternity by writing : "I am disappointed by that stroke of death which has eclipsed the gaiety of nations and impoverished the public stock of harmless pleasure"; and on the first of February Mary's carriage was among those that made a long line from the Strand to Westminster Abbey, where the actor was buried at the foot of Shakespeare's statue.

A couple of days later the dead man's lively young pupil charms the ladies in the boxes with the presentation of an artless younger sister's fortunes in a sprightly comedy of the time, and soon after she wrings their hearts with the misfortunes of a princess's waiting woman, frail victim to a murderous duke's affections, "the pure carnation of her dimpling cheek" blanched with fear as she is led through a forest of mediaeval Lombardy by hired assassins. For her benefit night in April she is Cordelia, and the memory of her dead master hangs all about her like a shroud as she plays the soft-voiced daughter to another Lear. Next month she is a resolute young lady in a comedy of the period eloping down a ladder of ropes in boy's costume, and again from Portia, sweetly solemn, she changes to Fidelia, a passionate and desperate woman assuming the male attire of a lieutenant in order to follow a misanthropical sea captain, and proceeding to the most outrageous hazards to compel him to yield himself prisoner to her desires.

This impersonation lifts her at once into a new region of accomplishment. Few actresses who have had the wit and the courage have had the will to shine in a rôle that so pitilessly exposes the depths of feminine treachery. It is a rôle requiring the rare combination of suppleness and audacity besides the broadest intel-

lectual conception of the shifts to which passion will reduce humanity and of the grimaces which nature compels into the faces of men and women struggling in the network of their own pitiful weaknesses. On the night that Mary played Fidelia most of the critics, with characteristic frivolity, were away listening to the sweet tunes in an Italian opera written upon the subject of Mr. Sheridan's "*Duenna*"; nor must it be forgotten that many people were shocked at the success with which Mary put on the breeches in these parts. A correspondent in a morning paper about this date sighs for the days when women were altogether excluded from the stage and men put on the petticoats of female characters in order to spare their sisters the humiliation and the outrage on modesty involved in a public appearance on the boards of a theatre.

As Viola, Mary is again a woman in man's attire pleading for the master whom she secretly loves before the woman who will have none of him, and again the misleading perfections of the pleader in her male disguise creep in at the eyes of the obdurate lady and make sport of her emotions. Fidelia and Viola are similar in outline, but in place of the unmerciful audacity of Wycherley pursuing the reality of his situations not only to the edge, but down the abyss of a precipice, are the rapture and the whimsical fancy of Shakespeare encrusting the thin ice of these situations with a thick layer of poetic imagery and effecting a romantic rescue of his persons from sheer catastrophe. Even Lord Lyttelton admired the dexterity of an actress who could assume two such parts in rapid succession. He had not credited the inexperienced girl of Hatton Garden with these powers. Always ready to admit an

intellectual error, he now wrote to Mary : “ As Fidelia you enriched the leisure of a busy man, as Viola you have enlarged my view of Shakespeare. I had indeed utterly misjudged you, and on the word of a confirmed libertine could wish it were in my power to do you some reparation.”

Mary smiles as she tosses aside the letter. Her triumph is all the sweeter to her for this testimony to its value. But she is tired of the breeches, and while Lyttelton is still praising her masculine effrontery as Fidelia, she is drawing fresh crowds to Drury Lane Theatre as Sicily’s lost daughter, the shepherdess at Bohemia’s sheep-shearing festival, by the mere summer of her presence compelling from her swain words that send the blood into a face worthy of the goddess Flora.

XIX

LORD LYTTELTON was ill at ease. The death of his cousin Captain Ayscough made him think more of that wholly disreputable person than he liked. He found himself wondering how it was that the memory of his foolish parasite was so lively. He had treated him again and again with the utmost contempt, had written of him, spoken of him, spoken to him in terms that would have forfeited most men's friendship, but Ayscough was always back again smiling at Lyttelton's elbow, until at last the young nobleman had come to acquiesce in his presence, regarding him in the light of an obsequious steward who presided over the viler portion of his master's estate. To free himself from the oppression of this man's memory and to prepare himself for the coming session in Parliament he had gone to Ireland for a week at the beginning of November. Lord North's Government had refused the Irish demand for troops wherewith to protect the country from foreign invasion. The consequences were serious, for the Irish associations had raised forty thousand volunteers without the consent of Great Britain. As a member of the Irish House of Commons told Lyttelton on his visit, they had their backs towards England and their faces towards America, and these armed volunteers were ready not only to repel foreign invasion but to resist English tyranny. Lyttelton prepared his speech for

the meeting of Parliament with exactitude. Not only had he carefully mastered the facts concerning the Volunteer movement, the demand for Free Trade, and the state of Irish opinion on the connection with Great Britain, but he had made numerous drafts of the speech, seeking in each fresh one to present his material with added compression and heightened eloquence, and using all the craft of his literary experience to aid him in his object.

But as he sat in his house in Hill Street and polished the sentences with all the love of a collector rubbing the surface of a cherished jar with a silk cloth, the memory of Ayscough thrust itself up at him with increased importunity. "How strange," meditated the young man, "that death should have swollen this man's importance, so as to make me unable to banish him from my thoughts." He was glad his cousin was dead, but he cursed him for coming between him and the fulfilment of this delicate, difficult work. Already he had a reputation in the House of Lords as an orator, and he enjoyed the knowledge that a speech from him commanded more than ordinary attention. Parliament was to meet on the following day. There were still rough edges here and there in the surface of his prose. Instead of directing his attention to their removal he found himself weakly admiring felicities in the phraseology of his speech. Again and again he examined the words he had used to lash the pusillanimity of the Government, the indecisive and sluggish spirit of their administration.

"A rope of sand crumbling away day by day," he kept on repeating to himself with an almost childish satisfaction in the figure. It was late enough to wonder

whether his mind would not be freshened by a visit to the Pantheon, but he felt reluctant to move from his study, for the night was cold. Growing restless over his manuscripts he took a turn about the room and chanced upon a copy of Coombe's "Diaboliad" in his bookcase. The discovery jumped with the perpetual obsession of Ayscough in his mind, and he opened the poem at the page on which himself and his cousin were satirised.

Suddenly he pushed the book from him in disgust. What a judgment to go down to posterity as the inseparable companion of such a man as Ayscough ! Yet so he was pictured in the poem. Since it was written, much had happened. He was no longer the wild scapegrace son of a distinguished man, but a peer of the realm with serious claims to statesmanship. Vice still exercised a fascination for him which he would have been the last to deny. In the summer of this very year he had lured two daughters of Mrs. Amphlet, a widow and a friendly neighbour of his late father's, to Hagley. Their mother had died recently. Lyttelton remembered with a shudder how Ayscough had congratulated him on the circumstance ; and the lines in Coombe's poem clung to his mind :

Have I not acted ev'ry villain's part ?
Have I not broke a noble parent's heart ?
Do I not daily boast how I betrayed
The tender widow and the virtuous maid ?

Three years had passed since that poem was written, but the description was as just to-day as then. " And yet," Lyttelton reflected, " I am a good man in comparison with Ayscough." Then he laughed at himself for taking all this trouble to make moral distinctions. To-morrow,

as soon as his speech was over, he would go to Pit Place, his new home near Epsom, with a party of friends. The two Miss Amphlets should join him, and he would make merry after the strain of the debate. Pit Place was cosier than Hagley with its melancholy groves and classical statues. Comforted by the bright prospect, he seated himself again at his manuscripts, and was about to re-write a sentence which he deemed too cumbrous in construction, when he thought he heard the flapping of wings at the window of his study. So odd was the sound, so unexpected, so unmistakable in the silence of the night, which was by now far advanced, that Lord Lyttelton was tempted to ring for his servant. But it would take time to rouse him, and it was easier to leave the study and go to bed.

“This Irish business is wearing my brain,” he muttered as he passed the window from which the sound had come. Yet he was conscious that a certain fear had fabricated for him an explanation for what was not intelligible. His main preoccupation was to get to bed as quickly as possible, and he flung his clothes in some disorder about the room, and extinguishing his candle drew the bedclothes close round him and fell asleep.

He awoke the next morning with the vague but certain impression that something momentous had happened to him. But when he sought to analyse the source of this impression, his brain refused its office. He felt like one groping in dark places and colliding ever and anon with some unseen object of which he could guess neither the shape nor the meaning. That he had dreamed unpleasantly, he knew; but was at a loss to understand how the effect of the dream could linger

with such cruel persistence and the dream itself vanish so completely from his memory. If he could only remember what it was about, he might argue away some of the horror of it. His first thought was of Ayscough, but it was not of Ayscough that he had dreamed. No, it was of something that had happened to himself. With his mind still a prey to this gloomy curiosity he dressed himself and passed into the neighbouring room, catching sight of his study window through an open door as he moved across the passage. At once the mysterious sound of the previous night recurred to his memory, and following swiftly upon this came with crushing precision the substance of what he had dreamed and still bore like a load of sorrow and misgiving that weighed down his spirits and stayed them from expanding to the business and the duties of a new day.

He could not remember the hour at which he had awoke to the sound of something fluttering against the window-pane. The queer fumbling of wings impressed him almost comically. What bird in the dead of a winter's night would seek admittance to a house in Hill Street? But while he tingled with wonder, the whirr of wings infinitely soft sounded in his ears. On the railing of his bedstead perched a dove, its tiny head motionless, its eyes peering solemnly at the man as he lay there. The beauty of its head was perceptible in a glimmer of light that shone about the little creature. Lord Lyttelton marvelled at the silken iridescence of the feathers; and the strangely human presence of the bird took the edge from his fear. He felt as if he ought to say something to propitiate its intentions. "Angels have

wings," he kept on murmuring to himself, and the figure of the dove confused itself in his vision with that of a small angel in effigy. The shapely head and the mild radiance of the eyes suited the transformation. Then it seemed to Lyttelton that this little woman was crying, and that he was distressed at her grief. He begged and begged her to speak, to tell the cause of those tears. His entreaties seemed to augment her sorrow. At last in a thin voice which carried with it a silvery tone, as of enchanted bells, he heard her say, "You have not three more days to live." The whirr of wings sounded again in his ears. The thing was gone. Nor had he been conscious of any interruption to his night's repose. Only when he awoke, his spirits were weighted with the singular foreboding which he now traced to his dream.

He did not suffer the occurrence to dislocate a single item in the programme of his day. An hour was spent with his manuscripts, another hour writing invitations to the Miss Amphlets, to Captain Wolseley and to some other friends to join him at Pit Place on the twenty-seventh of the month, two days hence. Taking his seat next Lord Shelburne in the House of Lords, he rose at an early period in the debate on the Address to deliver himself on the subject of Ireland. A well-modulated voice enhanced the effect of the vigorous and carefully chosen words in which he attacked the policy of the Government.

"Cast your eyes for a moment," said he, "on the state of the Empire. America, that vast continent, with all its advantages to us as a commercial and maritime people—lost—for ever lost to us; the West Indies abandoned; Ireland ready to part from us.

Ireland, my lords, is armed : and what is her language ? ' Give us free trade and the free Constitution of England as it was originally, such as we hope it will remain, the best calculated of any in the world for the preservation of freedom.' "

The rest of his speech was an eloquent plea for compromise with Ireland, and a denunciation of that "chain of expedients" which, while it had oppressed the Irish people, had never quenched their spirit. He laid emphasis not only on the goodness but also on the wisdom of justice in a situation in which more than justice might be demanded and might have to be conceded. The doctrine of royal prerogative had been strained already to the point of bursting. The speaker impressed the House more favourably than the speech. Lord Hillsborough congratulated Lyttelton on his rhetorical powers and the care with which he had informed himself on matters of fact. As to the strain of cajolery mixed with threats by which the young peer had sought to sway the House, he counteracted whatever effect it might have had by a calm denial that the situation was anything like so grave as Lord Lyttelton had represented it, driving the young man to heated interruptions which culminated in his declaring that if they did not accept his proposals they would have to face " the dire alternative of the total separation of Ireland from Great Britain."

What the House thought of this threat may be judged from the fact that the Marquis of Rockingham's amendment to the Address was lost by eighty-two votes to forty-one, Lord Lyttelton voting with the minority, and the Address was then agreed to without a division.

“ Why do you look so depressed ? ” said Hugh Fortescue the next day as he chanced upon his cousin sauntering in St. James’s Park with the idleness of one who has never known what occupation means. “ Is it because Hillsborough, the stupidest of your brother peers, paid you such fine compliments on your speech ? ”

Lyttelton smiled faintly.

“ No, ’twas not of that I was thinking ” said he. “ Those are things of yesterday. Hillsborough was wrong ; the majority who voted with him were wrong ; and I was right with my minority. They don’t know Ireland as I do. But a Government which can lose America can do anything. I have done with politics. I was thinking of something entirely different when you came upon me. I was thinking—— ”

He glanced shyly at his cousin, whom he liked ; then linking his arm in his :

“ I was thinking of death, ” said he.

Fortescue laughed. But when he had heard the story of Lyttelton’s dream, something in the manner of the narrator conveyed to him a feeling of uneasiness.

“ No man has more thoroughly enjoyed doing wrong than I have, ” said Lyttelton. “ But I should not have enjoyed it so much if I believed in nothing. With me, sin has been conscientious, and I enjoyed the wrong thing not only for itself but also because it was wrong. Suppose it to be true that I have not more than three days to live—— ”

“ You take the whole thing too seriously, ” interposed his cousin.

“ Join me at Pit Place to-morrow, ” said Lyttelton. “ Then you shall see if I take it seriously. ”

But Fortescue was engaged in town. He found an excuse however for calling at Hill Street the next morning, and was considerably relieved to find his cousin in good spirits and ready for a walk. Their way took them through a churchyard, and Lyttelton made merry over the graves.

"Have you noticed," said he, "what a number of vulgar fellows die at five-and-thirty? But you and I, who are gentlemen, shall live to a good old age."

Fortescue expressed his satisfaction at the other's recovery from the gloom of yesterday.

"Oh yes," cried Lyttelton, "I think I have bilked the ghost."

His cousin eyed him critically, but the frank ringing voice in which the jest was almost hurled at him disarmed all suspicion. What a rare person Lyttelton was: a brain and a temperament, with intermittent flashes of conscientious scruple that dismayed this man as much as the spectacle of his vices dismayed his friends. And how different were the estimates of him. One said he was destined either to be a Secretary of State or to finish his days in an asylum for lunatics; another took his talent for painting so seriously as to predict for him European fame as an artist; another called him charlatan and laughed openly at the solemnity with which, in his speech on the previous day, he had dwelt on his duty as an Englishman, as a Lord of Parliament, as a subject of his sovereign. And while these conflicting views passed rapidly through the head of Fortescue, his cousin was bidding him "adieu" in the exaggerated style of a Macaroni. Fortescue laughed so much that Lord Lyttelton was persuaded to mimic a number

of gentlemen of their common acquaintance in their methods of taking departure ; Mr. Fitzgerald, Count Belgiojoso and others falling within the scope of his satirical imitations. The cousins parted at last without any salutation in an explosion of laughter.

XX

YOUNG Sir John Lade was a constant visitor at the Robinsons' house, and on the evening of the Sunday following Lyttelton's speech he took his seat at the card table for a game of quadrille. Mrs. Abington made the fourth, and the game was proceeding at an easy pace without the enlivening influence of many surprises, when Count Belgiojoso entered the room. A fresh hand had just been dealt and Tom was impatient to hasten on the play. The gloom on the Imperial Ambassador's face irritated him, more particularly as he anticipated that the visit meant an interruption to the game, but Belgiojoso moved slowly to a seat in the neighbourhood of Mary and bade them continue. It was not long however before a whispering on his side of the table confused Tom in his reckoning. He heard the name of Lyttelton, which made him still more impatient, and glancing with comic exasperation at the Count :

“ False matadore,” cried he, “ what of Lyttelton ? Surely he is not important enough to spoil our game.”

“ He will no more spoil anybody's game,” replied the Count, “ for he is dead.”

The ladies looked up from their cards.

“ Dead ? ” cried Mrs. Abington sharply, as if she were uncertain whether she had heard aright.

“ Dead ? ” echoed Mary incredulously.

The Count had just heard the news. Lyttelton had died suddenly at Pit Place, after eating a hearty supper in convivial company and spending the evening in a flow of spirits.

“What ailed him?” said Mrs. Abington, shifting her cards as she asked the question.

“Nothing ailed him,” replied Belgiojoso. “His cousin who conveyed the news to me assures me he was in the best of health. But he had been warned by a ghost, or said he had, only a few days before.”

“And he had enjoyed a hearty supper?” said Mrs. Abington.

“Poor Lyttelton,” said Tom: “What are trumps?”

The game proceeded to a close without further interruption except for the calling of the cards. But in spite of Mrs. Abington’s lively sallies and Tom’s attempt to change the colour of the game by turning his coat inside out, the spirit of dulness was in the deals. Several persons had come in as the final score was counted, and Tom was only too glad to change from quadrille to faro. Soon a number of figures were bending over the oval green table, and little piles of coins were shining along its border marked out in coloured tape. Tom took the bank, Sir John Lade faced him as croupier, and the air rang with cries of “*Quinze le va, sept le va, l'une pour l'autre!*”

But Mary did not play. The day before had been her twenty-first birthday, and the company of Drury Lane had celebrated the occasion by a supper at which she had been the centre of congratulation. And while they made merry Lord Lyttelton had died. The thing was incredible! But she took refuge from the

shock produced by the fact in an enquiry into the circumstances, and sat listening to Belgiojoso's account of Lord Lyttelton's dream, made all the more melancholy for the neighbourhood of the gaming table. The Count spoke cynically of this dream : either it was the invention of Fortescue or of Lyttelton himself, who wished to end his life by a supreme jest which should perplex posterity for ever. He inclined to assume the latter alternative, which accorded with the whimsical nature of the young man. But why should he want to take his own life ? That was difficult, almost impossible to determine. Mary was certain that the dream was no fabrication, but she wanted to know more of the circumstances. As the evening wore on, Lyttelton's death became the absorbing topic of conversation. Other accounts were provided, and served still further to obscure the truth. Some said the mysterious warning had been conveyed by a female figure which appeared at the foot of his bed, and that the dove was a flight of imagination which had crept into the original account. Others ridiculed the whole story, and explained the suddenness of the event by an apoplectic seizure. On retiring to bed Lyttelton had ordered his valet to mix some rhubarb, and cursed the fellow out of the room for bringing it to him without a spoon. In little more than a minute the man had returned to find his master fallen back motionless in the bed. His body was to lie in state at Hagley, the place from whose sombre memories he had fled for that last gathering of wild associates. From the subject of his death the conversation veered to the terms of his will. How would his discarded wife fare ? Who was to reign at Hagley ?

By the end of the evening Tom was boisterous, for he had won large sums at play ; but Mary did not respond to his exhilarated speeches, and she was glad when he repaired to the neighbouring premises in Covent Garden where he lodged. Lyttelton's death, which affected him so little, troubled her all the more for the neighbourhood of the husband who was so indifferent to his own honour. When she was alone, she was surprised to find herself still weighed down by an oppression for which she could not easily account. Grief for Lyttelton's death could not be its origin, and yet she felt almost afraid of the punishment which had overtaken him. For as a punishment she regarded his sudden dissolution. Any other explanation was too complicated. But a short time before, he had written to her an admission that in his judgment of her talents at least he had erred. She wished now that she had answered the letter. The gaiety of her company on this Sunday night rose up against her as a reproach against the memory of the dead man, now that they were gone and she was left to her reflexions.

His was a face difficult to imagine in the cold, passionless immobility of death, and as she lay alone in the silent hours of the night, her memory of him, as he was—audacious, volatile, proud in spirit—clashed in dismaying vehemence with her attempt to picture him locked in the narrow confines of a coffin, with set features into which the flickering light of many candles could never more conjure the life. All her slumbering instinct for piety was awakened by the tragic news of his death—the death of one who had sought to identify her with the dark passions of a



From a mezzotint engraving by Charles Townley, after the picture by R. Cosway, R.A.

THOMAS LORD LYTTELTON.

nature striving brilliantly towards high civic achievement. That she had withheld him from the commission of another sin in that career of debauchery was no merit. For, as she recognised, temptation, so far as Lyttelton was concerned, had never even brushed her with the hem of its garment. But she sighed as she thought of Grandmamma Elizabeth and the good resolutions which in that short visit had been made and so heedlessly forgotten in the vortex of her theatrical career. She could not justify to herself the substitution of quadrille and faro for the observation of religious duties, and then—in a sudden enlightenment, as it were—the sense of shame which overcame her confused itself with a feeling of gratitude towards Mr. Sheridan. He had visited her several times in her new establishment, and without expressing any opinion had left her on each occasion with a feeling of misgiving, as if he had silently conveyed to her through that wistful look which he knew so well how to bring into his eyes, his own solicitude for her safety in the midst of her luxurious surroundings.

Suppose Mr. Sheridan to find himself hurried into unsuspected difficulties by the discovery of a passion for her. She blushed at the thought, and was angry with herself for letting it come so near. Luckily Mr. Sheridan loved his young wife. Almost with the sadness of resignation Mary was thankful that this was so, and that he would never know to what perilous depths he had stirred her own emotions by the assiduous chivalry of his conduct. But she was humiliated in the thought that her contempt for Lord Lyttelton had been unduly exaggerated. Of politics

she knew little, and she was not disposed to dispute his pre-eminence in this field of ambition. There was all the difference between the public importance of a rising actress and that of a rising statesman. It was the knowledge of his superiority in this regard that had made her place an undue emphasis on his inferiority as a person in private life. The suddenness of his death, above all, the supernatural circumstances associated with it, took all the venom from her memory of his persecution. His chances of distinguishing himself in the eyes of his King and his country, brilliant as they had been, were nipped in the bud of promise. Hers were blossoming into flower.

She had not played Perdita half a dozen times, and already their Majesties had commanded a performance of "*A Winter's Tale*" for the Friday in the following week. The part was familiar enough to her ; it was brought into all the greater prominence by the version of Garrick, which omitted all the earlier scenes in the play and started with the arrival of Sicily's king in Bohemia after the lapse of sixteen years in which his daughter has grown up in the disguise of a shepherdess. Mary had already captivated the critics by the involuntary sweetness of her impersonation. But how would she bear the ordeal of playing before the royal family ? That the publicity of her fame touched her, was evident in the gasp of mingled fear and satisfaction which escaped her when first she saw the play-bill announcing the royal command and her own name in the part of Perdita. For a moment her thoughts sprang back to the days when her ambitions had been no more than the unsubstantial dream of a girl. But

at the swift recognition that she had passed into the reality of an accomplished actress, the implied compliment took less imposing shape. She was no longer the amateur, reciting a few passages to a theatrical manager as if her very soul depended on the favour of his judgment. As she lay thinking of the approaching royal performance, she grew proud in the reflexion that although only yesterday she had celebrated her twenty-first birthday she had already been chosen to interpret the work of Wycherley, Dryden, and Shakespeare ; and that in the history of the performance of their dramas her name was assured of a place. This was indeed a legitimate source of satisfaction ; all else idleness and vanity. After all, what was it to play before the King, but a social gratification ? She wished her brother were still in London, that she might have tested his abhorrence of the stage by an invitation to be in the theatre on this occasion of her honour. Her mother had said nothing, but it was easy to see that she felt a pleasure which she was naturally loath to express. Mary laughed to herself as she thought of the servility that might be expected from Mr. Harris were she to acquaint him of the royal patronage. Perhaps he had already read of it in the papers.

But even as her fancy strayed thus lightly along the paths of frivolous conjecture, the image of her dead persecutor thrust itself once more with ugly importunity into her meditations. Before she fell asleep, some lines recurred to her memory, which she had not recited since she was a little child. They were called “The Heavy Hours.” The good father who had written them, building a battlement of fame

about the name of Lyttelton, the wicked son who had cast bricks of infamy at his own father's structure, were both dead. Mary sighed and turned lazily in her bed, satisfied and perplexed at the luxury of surviving them.

XXI

GEORGE AUGUSTUS FREDERICK, Prince of Wales, leaned on the ledge of the stage box which he occupied in Drury Lane Theatre on the evening of the third of December, and followed the fortunes of Perdita with the closest attention. In those days the "stage" box was so called from its position, not near but upon the stage itself, which escaped for an ample distance beyond the proscenium into the body of the auditorium. With His Royal Highness was his brother Frederick, Bishop of Osnaburgh, to whom he was senior by a year. The other children of their Majesties were not old enough to attend the performance with profit to themselves, and had been left in the royal nursery. But more than seventeen years had passed since the Prince had been born, and his taste and talent for literature and the arts were admitted even by the tutors who had not known how to curb his rebellious spirit. His brother had been a bishop ever since he had been a baby of six months old, and both the young gentlemen wore their high dignities with spirited indifference to the responsibilities with which a vulgar conception of their offices credited them.

In a box opposite the young Princes were their Majesties. The Queen was attended by Lady Holderness, Miss Vernon, Miss Gunning and the Marquis of Carmarthen. The King was attended by the Duke

of Northumberland, the Earls of Denbigh, Hertford, Waldegrave and the Marquis of Lothian. The solemn deportment of the occupants of this box was in marked contrast with the careless zest in the performance displayed by the Prince of Wales. In fact the King looked bored, the Queen looked worried, but the Heir-apparent wore an enraptured air ; and not content with leaning from the box in a manner as unconcerned as it was conspicuous, indulged from time to time in comments of enthusiastic approbation that made even his brother pluck him bashfully by the sleeve to recall him to the imprudence of his conduct.

“I tell thee, Fred, she’s ravishing, positively ravishing !” cried the Prince, annoyed at the interruption of his brother, in a voice so high that it not only reached the ears of the gentlemen in attendance in the box, but also those of Mary herself. The gentlemen tittered, and even the young Bishop could not withhold a smile. He was anxious not to excite the indignation of his papa and mamma, but brother George was irresistible. Nothing could damp the buoyancy of his spirits when they were up, and he was in a state of ripe rebellion against the counsels and lectures of tutors and preceptors and sub-preceptors by whom he had been surrounded, with the most arbitrary precaution, by his father ever since he had been a child.

Mary was all the more disconcerted by the observation which she had overheard, because in the Green Room a few minutes before, she had been rallied on her beauty by Mr. Smith, who performed the part of Leontes. “By Jove, Mrs. Robinson,” he had exclaimed, “you will make a conquest of the Prince ; for to-night you look handsomer than ever !” She

had laughed aside the compliment, and now from the lips of the Prince himself had come the involuntary tribute that could not be ignored.

“O Lady Fortune, stand you auspicious !” she whispered, half amused, half frightened at the greater difficulty of saying her lines occasioned by the Prince’s unguarded utterance. She knew that the words were coming with mechanical accuracy from her lips, but she could not give herself up to their meaning. Once she glanced at the box and saw the Prince with raised finger, hanging on the rhythm of the lines like the conductor of an opera, his face slightly flushed and his eyes fixed on her movements in a stare of extravagant ecstasy. In the intervals between her appearances on the stage she was entertained by the conversation of young Lord Malden, to whom she had been introduced by the son of Mr. Ford who with Lacy and Sheridan shared possession of the theatre. Malden was a gay sprig of juvenile nobility, and stayed in the wings of the theatre throughout the performance. The Prince observed him in conversation with Perdita, and frequently spoke to a gentleman in waiting in the box in a way that left little doubt that Mary was the subject of His Royal Highness’s encomium ; and it was the most comical sight imaginable to see the Bishop preserve an imperturbable gravity on his fox-like face as he now sat in the front of the box, ostensibly absorbed in the play and innocent of the high spirits which reigned among the others. The festival of the lads and lasses dancing about the stage and buying ribbons and gloves at the door of the shepherd’s cottage was more than matched in the intensity of its mirth by the festival

of wit and ribaldry within this stage box. It was as if by the levity of their conduct these gentlemen sought to direct public attention to the difference between the dull, good King, so obedient to the commands of his clever domineering mother, and the naughty, spirited Prince so disobedient to anything like paternal authority, so nimble in evading any influence directed at him from that quarter in anything less impressive than the shape of a royal command.

Neither the King nor the Queen thought much of the performance. George the Third disliked Shakespeare ; the poetry sounded high-strained, fantastic, often unintelligible to the simple-minded man whose affections were jocularly supposed to be centred in a leg of mutton and his wife, and whose mental sympathies were no less comically restricted. So far as he took the trouble to judge Mary as an actress, he thought her feeble and exasperatingly affected, and towards the end of the performance it was clear from the unsteady blinking in the royal eyes that he was tired and eager to go to bed. Queen Charlotte liked music and dancing ; she could talk shrewdly of books, but she had no profound sense of literature, and she was worried about one of the children who had a cold. At this time the King was little over forty, and his consort was several years younger ; but the pall of domestic virtue, unrelieved by the intermixture either of high culture or of high intellectual activity, had already gathered in close folds about the royal household. They had too many children and too few fires in the corridors of Buckingham House to make them really sociable people.

As the curtain fell upon the curtsies of the per-

formers on this evening the royal visitors condescended to bow. Mary glanced at the stage box, and the Prince looked at her with so little attempt to conceal the passion that rose within him at the sight of her beauty that she blushed. The amorous encounter of such eyes, meeting as it were in a cross-fire, was described by the poet Byron little more than a quarter of a century later ; but the subject of the description is very much older. As the curtain shut the captivating vision of Perdita from the Prince's view he sighed and inclined his head once more. When she walked to her chair which was waiting to carry her home, Mary met the royal family crossing the stage on their way out of the theatre. Again the Prince bowed, not as a courtier performing an act of ceremony, but with the solemnity of a pagan boy impressed to the verge of ecstasy at the overwhelming beauty of a sunrise.

The supper party at Mrs. Robinson's was more than usually gay on that evening, and the hostess was loaded with compliments. The prophecy of the actor known for his courtliness among the company as "Gentleman" Smith had been fulfilled ; but Mary's guests expressed their recognition of the achievement in loud and unrestrained admiration of the young Heir-apparent. He was the most accomplished prince in Europe ; he could sing the nightingale to shame, and outdistance his master Crosdill on the violoncello ; his French accent was delicious, so was his Italian. His was a nature all romance and poetry, and it was darkly hinted that the brilliant youth was a sharp thorn in the side of his dull disciplinarian papa, with his fads for teaching his eldest sons how to till land, how to sow it with corn, which they had to reap and

thrash and see ground to flour and made into bread. Both young men had other and wilder oats to sow, and were almost as insensible to the claims of the royal prerogative as their rebellious colonist cousins across the sea.

It was Mr. Fox who provided the company with the liveliest sallies on this subject. The King hated him for that growing sympathy with the people which had culminated in a violent attack on His Majesty in the House of Commons on the same day that Lord Lyttelton had championed the grievances of Ireland in the other House. Moreover, he had opposed the Royal Marriages Bill by which His Majesty had marked his displeasure at the secret marriage of his brother the Duke of Cumberland, and insisted on the King's consent as necessary to establish the validity of all marriages in the Royal Family. For different reasons the political spirit of Fox, the independent and reckless character of the young heir to the throne, and the bitter enmity of the Duke of Cumberland and his Duchess for the King were all contributing at this time to consolidate the forces of opposition to the royal politics.

But while Fox's dark eyes sparkled with wine and lent rapturous support to these glowing accounts of the young Prince's character at Mrs. Robinson's supper party, the Prince himself was a subject of the gravest concern to the gentlemen who waited upon him. He wanted at once to visit the adorable Perdita, that night, that hour, that very minute. His language was no less extravagant than the situation which provoked it. As he was driven to Buckingham House his talk was of the moon and the stars, and it was as much as

those in attendance could contrive, to preserve a solemn face. Everything pointed to the folly of His Royal Highness pursuing such a suddenly conceived whim, with consequences which could not be measured but were bound to be deeply serious. With difficulty he was persuaded at last to allow his royal parents to go to bed before starting on his rash expedition ; and in the interval which elapsed in the process, his brain obtained sufficient mastery over his passion to see the wisdom of employing the services of a messenger to break the fall of these emotions upon the unsuspecting heart of the more than divine lady. A gentleman was at once despatched in search of Lord Malden with instructions on finding him to bring him post haste to the Prince's apartment. A couple of hours passed before Malden appeared. The Prince was in a high state of disorder and had threatened again and again to leave Buckingham House in disguise and visit the lovely Perdita that night. The art of assuming disguise on an amorous expedition ran in that family, for it was not long since the Duke of Cumberland, this young man's uncle, had donned a brownish wig coming low on the forehead, a blue and white flannel waistcoat and a light drab coat with a handkerchief round his neck, in order to pursue Lady Grosvenor, and had actually taken up his residence in one of the nearest public houses that he might be near her. Where the uncle had succeeded, why should the nephew fail ? Some time was spent in discussing a suitable disguise, and brandy and water were ordered to add a touch of joviality to good counsel. The impatience of the Prince was again rising beyond the bounds of control, when Lord Malden was admitted

to his apartment, and at the request of his Royal Highness the other gentlemen retired.

“Malden, I’m undone. My brain is on fire!” cried the Prince as he flung himself upon a sofa. Lord Malden smiled with bland solicitude. He was the Prince’s senior by five years, and this was not the first occasion on which his tact and diplomacy had been exercised in the skilful conduct of a delicate crisis in the Prince’s life. When he had heard a perfervid account of the raptures of that evening and the suspense which succeeded them, he urged his young master to use the utmost circumspection. But the Prince raged.

“I tell you,” said he, “I will not wait. I have been cooped up long enough, and I burn with impatience for this adventure. You know all about this lady. Tell me quickly.”

“She has a husband,” Malden began in a tentative voice.

“Shoot him for me,” cried the Prince.

“There is no need,” added his adviser quickly. “If your Royal Highness will but use a little deliberation and——”

“Talk not to me of deliberation, Malden. I tell you I am mad as Hercules. ’Tis past one o’clock already. Come, let us go together now. You know where she lives. You can gain access to her; bribe her men—what you will—but this waiting kills me.”

He grasped eagerly at a glass. Lord Malden hastened to fill it with brandy. When the Prince had drunk, he took him by the arm and led him to the window, from which they could see the guard in the courtyard below.

"You cannot go to-night. The guard would be bound to observe our departure," said he. "And the King——"

At the mention of his father, George stamped with impatience, but again Lord Malden's gentle pressure on his arm restrained him from the angry outburst that rose to his lips.

"Do you remember," said Malden, "how on another occasion His Majesty commanded you to a game of chess on the evening and at the very hour when I was about to conduct you to a lady's apartments? To be intercepted a second time would be foolish."

The Prince smiled stupidly enough to enable Malden to conclude that the brandy, if it had not warped his intentions, had at least induced a benevolent disposition towards his counsellor.

"Tell me, Malden," said he in a voice from which the peevish note disappeared as he proceeded. "How does she seem when you speak to her? Her breath is like the perfumes of Araby, is it not? Her teeth—to call them pearls is to belittle their beauty. Her voice is like the whisper of distant water. As I watched you speak with her I wished away a kingdom."

"How can I better your description?" said the man of twenty-two, gazing with a kind of desperate compassion at the boy of seventeen. "You should set this down on paper."

"Oh, you would put me to school like the others," cried the Prince petulantly. "But I have had enough of versifying. Majendie taught me to write elegiacs, but this is no case for schoolboy exercises. I have read more than enough of love. You should be my Ovid in the practice. I want to strike the moon

with my head, to kill an army of suitors, to follow her to the other end of the world. Come, lead the way."

Malden led him in silence to an escritoire, tore a sheet of the royal paper, and put a pen in his hand.

"Write," was all he said.

The Prince looked blankly at him.

"Words fail me," he cried.

"Think yourself in her presence, think yourself—*Florizel*," said Malden, suddenly inspired. The pen slipped rapidly over the sheet. Malden was at his shoulder as the Prince wrote. But at the first scratch of a signature the nobleman jerked his arm.

"How now?" cried the Prince with an oath.

"To sign George, Prince of Wales, were to kill romance at a stroke of the pen. As Perdita, she made her conquest. I would have you sign this royal proclamation *Florizel*. Leave the rest to me."

"*Florizel*," wrote the Prince with a flourish that covered half the page. "And you will take this to her?" said he, handing the note across the table. Lord Malden bowed and placed it in his bosom pocket. Scarcely waiting for the Prince's thanks he took his departure.

George Frederick Augustus sat for a few minutes in his chair with half-closed eyes. Once more the picture of Mary Robinson floated before his vision, a shepherdess divinely fair with flowers on her head and eyes like stars.

"Perdita," he murmured to himself, as if intoxicated with the music of the syllables, and again, "Perdita." Then he rang a bell for his attendant to put him to bed.

XXII

LORD MALDEN congratulated himself upon the happy issue to his sudden and precarious interview. A night's repose would dim the splendour of the Prince's vision. There was no reason for supposing that his fancy would be chained by the mere memory of a pretty and accomplished actress. Most likely another maid-of-honour would set eyes at the Heir-apparent, and so long as his predilections could be kept moving, Malden regarded the situation as comparatively free from danger. In the meanwhile, for the sake of precaution, he informed General Lake and Colonel Hulse, who superintended the Prince's hours of recreation, that the Prince relied upon him to establish a correspondence with a lady on the stage. It was hoped, of course, by all three gentlemen that the matter would expire altogether in the cold light of the next day following upon such sudden enchantment. But in any case, the strictest secrecy must be preserved. The rumour of an earlier intrigue some months before had reached the Queen's ears when matters were not yet ripe for execution, although nobody could say where the leakage had occurred, and the result had been an interview with her son in which she had not spared him or shown the slightest hesitation in tackling a subject delicate and difficult enough for any mother, and more than ordinarily so for a queen. United

by the firm conviction that this new infatuation, if such it were to prove, must be hermetically sealed from all possible sources of access to the royal parents, the three gentlemen were at liberty to indulge amongst themselves an unfeigned delight in the affair. Malden's description of the Prince's heroics was immensely entertaining, and it was agreed that the young man's rhapsodical speeches were in the finest taste and showed a liberal and gallant spirit which was of the highest promise for the future occupant of a throne.

Malden kept the Prince's letter in his pocket all Saturday and Sunday : if, as he hoped, the Prince thought no more of the matter, he would add it to his collection of private manuscripts ; some day history should be enriched by its discovery ; in the meanwhile he pursued the policy of masterly inactivity. But an urgent message from General Lake summoned him into the Prince's presence on Monday morning.

“ Well, Malden ? ” said the young man, as if no more than a moment's interruption had intervened between their conversation on the previous Saturday and now. “ What does she say ? Why have you not come sooner ? Were the wings of her message tipped with lead rather than with gold, that you stand abashed ? ”

Lord Malden coughed, glanced uneasily from the buckles that shone on his royal master's shoes to the dreamy languor in his eyes.

“ Is your Royal Highness still assured of the wisdom of this step ? ” he asked.

“ To Mesopotamia with your wisdom,” cried the Prince, striding angrily about the room. “ What had Paris to do with wisdom when he wooed Helen ? ”

Have you waited till now to tell me this? But I will go myself. Give me back the letter."

"I have it not with me," said Malden quietly.

"Dog and liar, I will have the coat stripped from your back and the pockets searched here and now."

"You will find nothing."

The Prince glanced furiously at him, and, satisfied that he was speaking truth, began to hum loudly a tune from an Italian opera.

"Listen," said Malden. "If it is your wish, I will go now to this Perdita and take the letter, but I could not do it earlier. Many a mind changes between a Saturday and a Monday. When last I saw you, your brain was in a fever. I know what these things mean. With all respect to your Royal Highness, I have acted as a friend."

The cajolery of his manner softened the Prince.

"'Twas not the brain, Malden, but the heart that was on fire; and still it burns and burns. Why am I surrounded by men of science who plague me with their cursed terminology? Just now Lake wanted me to see a surgeon to have myself examined. Could Paris have been cured of his love for Helen by a dose of rhubarb?"

"Or Florizel of his love for Perdita by the mud-baths of Albano? No," continued Malden, catching with smooth dexterity at the Prince's airy rhetorical style, "I will be Cupid's messenger," and he placed a hand upon his heart as he bowed.

"Good Malden," cried the youth. "Aye, Cupid's messenger. But borrow Mercury's sandals and fly to my Perdita."

Malden skipped, as if the royal thought itself were

enough to add wings to his shoes. The comical picture recalled the nimble graces of a favourite dancer to the Prince of Wales, and he laughed exuberantly as his visitor disappeared with agility from the room.

The last morning visitor had taken leave of Mary when Lord Malden reached her house in Covent Garden. So silent were his footsteps that she did not become aware of his presence until he stood in her room and had had time to note the look of private fatigue on her face, the look of one tired by too much company into an unfamiliar satisfaction in solitude. The formality of his greeting was no sooner accomplished than curiosity stole into her eyes at his air of preoccupied embarrassment and dispelled the fine dust of animal fatigue that had dimmed their lustre on his entrance.

“Forgive me, Madam——” he began, and then stopped as if seized by a sudden incapacity for articulation. She looked coldly mistrustful, and there was as much disdain as courtesy in her manner of motioning him to a chair.

“Apology must be the herald to the message I bear you,” he began again; and again he was so disconcerted by her imperturbable gravity that he knew not how to proceed.

Mary was amused, perplexed, unexpectedly entertained. He looked uneasily round the room, and the sight of his own reflection in a neighbouring mirror, which also doubled the exquisite repose of the lady, dismayed him anew. The merriment swimming unbidden at the corners of her lips recalled his self-possession.

“I hope you will pardon me, Madam,” said he,

"that you will mention to nobody what I am about to communicate. I beg you earnestly to consider the peculiar delicacy of my situation, and then to act as you think proper."

"I can only request you, my lord, to be more explicit."

He appeared to be weighing something imponderable, to be wrestling with a difficulty of unfathomable depths. After a few moments he tremblingly drew a small letter from his pocket. Its cover bore the name "Perdita" in an unfamiliar hand. Mary smiled and looked queerly at him from beneath drooping eyelids as she took the billet.

"Well, my lord, and what does this mean?" said she, when she had glanced hastily at the contents.

"Can you not guess the writer?" said Lord Malden.

"Perhaps yourself," she answered without a smile.

"Upon my honour, no. I should not have dared so to address you on so short an acquaintance."

"From whom then does this letter come?"

He rose and in a gesture conveyed to her the helplessness with which he was beset.

"Would that I had not undertaken to deliver it," he cried, "to be thus constrained to forfeit your good opinion; to figure as the wind blowing a dart from Cupid's quiver. Could you but picture the humiliation of such an office! And yet——"

"And yet, my lord?"

"I could not refuse, for this letter is from the Prince of Wales."

Now that he had shaken the burden of his communication from him, he looked keenly at her to observe

its effect. In the heightened arching of her eyebrows he read astonishment; in her eyes a whirlwind of doubt and agitation. She placed the letter carelessly on a table to which his eyes followed it. She observed his solicitude, and wondered whether or no it was counterfeit.

“ You satisfy me of the sincerity of your intentions, my lord,” she said ambiguously. “ The letter is a graceful compliment to Perdita which she will know how to appreciate at its just value. The sentiments are prettily expressed. Your lordship is aware that an actress is peculiarly well fitted to decide upon the merits of these compositions.”

Lord Malden bowed and took his leave. It was only too clear that he had not satisfied her that the message was genuine, and to protest at such a stage would have been ill-advised.

As soon as he was gone Mary snatched the letter from the table, read it, read it again, held the paper to the light. If this was indeed a letter from the Prince of Wales, why did it lack the royal superscription? Her finger ran along the edge of the paper. On one side it was rough. Then the sheet had been torn. It was a clever artifice to try and make her believe that royal prudence was the cause of the laceration. Lord Malden was testing the propriety of her conduct for his own ends. But the melting tenderness in the Prince’s eyes when they had met hers at the close of the performance was quick in her memory. How if Lord Malden’s asseveration were true?

If it was true, was it not an insult to address her thus under a feigned name on a torn sheet of paper?

Prudence? Was there prudence in his rapturous gaze? The name of Florizel meant nothing outside the play in which she figured as Perdita. Perhaps it was the momentary inspiration of a boy in love with literature. Her answer, if she gave any, must be in the name of the shepherdess. But why pursue her far from the territory of this fabled Bohemia into the privacy of her house in Covent Garden? And the contents of the billet, brief as they were, struck a note perceptibly out of tune with the theatrical music of the assumed names. There was in those few words something of awkwardness and of intimacy too, which, as it were, left wet the crude paint of the emotions under stress of which the note had been written.

George Prince in the meanwhile is all sickness and sorrow at Lord Malden's account of his interview. A couple of days later the trusted messenger carries in his face no more hope than before; he has been to a card party at Mrs. Robinson's and has sung his master's praises all the evening, in a manner artless enough to convince any woman less obstinately suspicious, that a personal knowledge of his subject could alone enable him to speak in such precise terms; and with an intention artful enough to spur the curiosity of any woman less sophisticated than this stage shepherdess. But she had listened with a cool gravity that still implied disbelief, if not absolute indifference.

"I must, I will see her," cries the Prince, and once again he submits to Lord Malden's counsel to write; but only on condition that Malden shall bid her go that night to Covent Garden Theatre where an oratorio of the late Mr. Handel is to be performed, and where the Prince will convince her by some signal

that her scepticism is ill-founded. Mary assents to the proposal, but she disconcerts the proposer again by inviting her husband in his presence to accompany her.

On their entering the balcony box she swiftly becomes aware that the Prince and his brother the Bishop are talking of her. The Prince cannot take his eyes from her direction even while he is engaged in conversation. Happily for her peace of mind the merry commotion of Mr. Handel's choruses so bewilders Tom that he sits staring about him, without perceiving either the progress of the story in "Alexander's Feast" or that of the Prince's unguarded behaviour. But several people in the pit glance from the royal box to where Mary is seated, and back again. George Frederick Augustus passes a hand across his forehead in a gesture of despair, waving the programme of the oratorio before him as if to fan himself. A moment later his hand moves across the ledge of the box as if in the act of writing, and on one of the gentlemen in waiting bringing him a glass of water, he takes it, raises it to his lips, pauses a moment, and then gazes deliberately in Mary's direction before drinking. Will this oratorio never come to a close, Mary wonders? Dimly she realises that it is all about Alexander the Great for whom, as Statira, she first died nearly a year ago on the stage of Drury Lane Theatre; but although her eyes read the words of Dryden's poem in the programme, her mind grasps nothing of their meaning. Whoever he may be in that box, whether Florizel or the Prince of Wales, he is her lover: no clever cynic like Lyttelton, no crazy Irishman with an attitude towards all women which reflects itself as in a mirror in her own artless description of it as "beautifully

interesting," but a youth in the first glow of manly folly, splendid no less in the effrontery of his address than in the comeliness of his person, knocking down the barriers of decorum and court etiquette with the careless joy of a child at a game of skittles.

Her thoughts between that night and the next morning were a confusion of doubt and wondering perplexity ; doubt of her own powers to withstand the tide of allurement that was sweeping her along, perplexity at the nature of what hidden consequences lay in wait for her. There were moments in which it seemed to her that her life, which had been dark enough hitherto in spite of its recent splendour, was opening out into broad plains of sun-steeped serenity. And there were moments when she fancied herself the victim of some imp of Satan, who was deluding her through the fable of Florizel and Perdita into the indulgence of a fantastic conviction that she was to know a happiness of which she had thought herself robbed for ever. Through her brain poured the names of kings and queens in history and in the dramas in which she had acted : a confused stream, as of many coloured lights converging to a point of dazzling brilliance.

It was late the next morning when she rang for her chocolate. As she unfolded the printed sheet for the day, her eyes rested on an account of the last night's performance which summoned all the blood into her cheeks. With an audacity common enough in journalists of that day, and replaced by a servile reticence masking itself under the name of "good taste" in our own, the writer satirised the Prince's conduct during the progress of the oratorio. After a panegyric

on His Royal Highness's accomplished taste in literature, it was stated that he showed more than usual enthusiasm for one passage of Dryden's poem, actually going so far as to act the scene described, and to convey, in a most graceful manner his vivid sympathy with the sentiments expressed. The following lines were then quoted :

The Prince, unable to conceal his pain,
Gazed on the fair
Who caused his care,
And sighed and looked, sighed and looked,
Sighed and looked, and sighed again.

As she read this account all the glamour melted from what she had felt, and in its place she became conscious of an abiding sense of humiliation. Already, then, she was the sport of public satire, a butt for the calumny of the paid writer seeking a scrap of scandal with which to add piquancy to the flavour of a lady's chocolate. Her name had not been mentioned in the article, but she could draw little solace from the omission. People would guess ; by the malice of their whispers her rivals on the stage would supply any gap in a wall of scandal. Flinging the sheet from her she stamped her foot angrily and vowed she would have no more to do with the matter. She would teach this young Prince a lesson in that very subject of love which he so openly preferred to politics. When her indignation had abated, she saw much humour in the situation. She was an actress at whom the Heir-apparent had had the audacity to make eyes in public. That was the A B C of the matter. Very well, she would accept the unflattering crudity of such an exposition. As an actress she would deny

him access to her, sport with his emotions, raise his hopes, dash them to earth again, ridicule him, abuse him, make scenes with him, remind him of his duty to his country, to his father, to his King. As Perdita she had been wooed by him ; but was her sympathy with the methods of the adventurous daredevil Fidelia anything less radical because she had also impersonated the soft shepherdess on a paid salary in a theatre ?

And the end ? What did she care about the end ? Where was the use of struggling away from her destiny ? Perhaps she would come out as the stainless Lady in Milton's "Comus." Or else she would bring this young Alexander to his knees. Taking up the programme of the oratorio from her table she searched in the printed poem for the passage which the satirist had quoted to serve his unhandsome purpose. How did it end ? She smiled as she read the lines :

At length, with love and wine at once oppressed,
The vanquished victor sunk upon her breast.

XXIII

ABOUT the time when Mary had made her first appearance on the stage, the King had been much disturbed by the discovery that his eldest son had an ungovernable temper. Revolutions had broken out among his tutors, and it had become necessary to appoint an entirely new set. The sovereign who was prepared to coerce a continent was not likely to brook insubordination in a boy of fourteen. George Prince, however, was indifferent to the aims and obligations of his royal father, and took a pardonable delight in correcting a misquotation of his new governor and convicting him of a false quantity. The instructors laughed, but the new governor retired precipitately and his office was taken by his amiable brother the Duke of Montague. Hurd, the new preceptor, combined piety and learning with a keen appetite for preferment. The King liked him, and the courtier in Hurd nursed the circumstance as tenderly as His Majesty's gardener nursed the plants at Kew.

No boy at fourteen ever led a duller life than George Prince; few boys of fourteen have ever been better fitted to survive the evil consequences of too much supervision. He had started with a governess, a deputy-governess, a wet nurse, a dry nurse, a "necessary woman" and two girls to rock his cradle. When he was nine years of age, the restrictions



From a mezzotint engraving by Valentine Green, after the picture by Benjamin West, P.R.A.

GEORGE PRINCE OF WALES, AND PRINCE FREDERICK, AFTERWARDS
DUKE OF YORK.

placed upon him by a numerous attendance were continued by the substitution of as many men for women. His royal papa had learnt nothing from the lesson of his son's rebellion at the age of fourteen ; and now that he was past seventeen, a vague distaste for German discipline had been crystallised into passionate resentment and the conviction that for him at least happiness could only be found in insubordination. This conviction was, moreover, strengthened by the knowledge that at nineteen the Heir-apparent becomes legally of age. Liberty shone at him, then, like a star daily increasing in brightness through the dismal vista of routine to which he was still formally condemned. Soon he would be free to travel abroad and air the perfection of his French and Italian, to judge the masterpieces of foreign art and do credit to his drawing master in the nicety of his criticism, to astonish the sovereigns of Europe by his taste in literature and the classics, to pink his man in a duel and show that he had profited by the lessons from his Russian fencing master.

To play the part of Florizel to Mary's Perdita was a delicious recreation in which he sought to realise his inherent love of romance. Here was a golden opportunity to signalise his contempt for the principles of practical monarchy which his obstinate, unimaginative father had so vainly sought to instil into him. To substitute the names of George and Mary for those of Perdita and Florizel and fling wisdom to the winds seemed to the ardent youth a token of sovereignty indeed ; not the calculating sovereignty of a commercial king who kept accounts

with the piddling precision of a bank clerk, but the sovereignty of high natures like those of Anthony or Alexander the Great. History, as he well knew, could provide royal precedents for this philosophy, more glorious if less numerous than those in which the elemental passions of the man had been meanly sacrificed to the base obligations of a constitutional king. Surprise that Mary should make herself so difficult of access when once he had openly, even defiantly, proclaimed the sincerity of his intentions, soon yielded to a sentiment of esteem for a delicacy which, to the libertine Malden, appeared no more than artful coquetry. The Royal Marriages Act precluded the possibility of marriage, although when it had been passed a few years before, the King little thought that its effects would so soon be experienced by his son, nor was he yet aware of the Prince's infatuation.

In the meantime Malden became the vehicle of communication between Florizel and Perdita over a period lasting into the spring of 1780, when the winter season at Drury Lane Theatre came to a close. In every letter Florizel renewed his solicitations for an interview. All the resources of that polite literature to which his tutors had introduced him, were now employed to bend the stubborn will of the shepherdess. From his grandfather, the ill-fated Prince Frederick, he had inherited the facility for versifying, and when prose could no longer convey the intensity of his emotions, he broke into poetry. Malden was secretly consumed with laughter over these effusions, especially when he thought of what the King would say to them if he could only know. Like the gout, poetry often skips a generation, he reflected. Had he dared, he

would have quoted Prince Frederick's Lines to a Lady to his grandson, lines in which the catalogue of charms would have fitted the actress to a nicety with her—

Lovely range of teeth so white
As new shorn sheep, equal and fair.

At first, Perdita answers in the language of Shakespeare. She has but to quote the lines from her part, for what could be more apt?

Oh, but dear sir,
Your resolution cannot hold, when 'tis
Oppos'd, as it must be, by the power o' the King.

George Prince pursues her on to her own ground in his reply :

Or I'll be thine, my fair,
Or not my father's.

Perdita beseeches him to take care of his own State and drown remembrance of her own poor beauties. When Florizel thinks she has no more Shakespeare left to quote at him, when thwarted passion clogs the course of his Muse and thickens the ink in his pen, he bids Malden convey jewels to her. To his dismay they are returned. At this point Malden expresses the wish to withdraw from these negotiations. But George Prince flies out at the word. Every moment that he can spare from the supervision of his tutors is spent in devising some new conceit with which to subdue the scruples of the divine shepherdess. Having escaped at last from a tedious exposition of the principles of gunnery and fortification conducted in the gardens of Kew, he spends a whole afternoon cutting out little hearts in white paper until he hits upon the size

and shape to suit his bewildered fancy. Perdita has wounded him by reflecting on the possibility that his sentiments may change. His answer is a present of his own portrait in miniature by the late Mr. Meyer, and within the case he carefully places the paper heart. *Je ne change qu'en mourant* he has written on one side of the tapering emblem, and on the other: *Unalterable to my Perdita through life*. "From prose to poetry," thinks obsequious Malden as he disappears on his errand with the gift, "from poetry to symbols. Where indeed will this folly end? But in any case the end must be soon. Can she refuse even this token?" In admitting that it was possible, he took added pleasure in reflecting that it was the height of improbability.

Capitulation glimmers, if only faintly, from the terms of her letter in which she acknowledges the gift. Will he not be patient until he becomes his own master? Will he rush headlong upon the rock of the whole Royal Family's displeasure? What does he know of the woman in the guise of a shepherdess whom he has wooed? If blind to his own danger, has he weighed hers? Let him tear aside for a moment the rich robe of romance in which this courtship was wrapped. She must quit her husband, her profession. Calumny and envy would plot at her destruction. The consequences of his folly (how else could she call it?) might be European. What right could she have to suppose that her happiness in the long run could outweigh considerations like these?

His reply is a masterpiece of tact and generosity. Difficult as it is for him to view in the cold light of worldly probabilities, the happiness to which her

letter encourages him to aspire, he is sensible of the obligation imposed upon him by the circumstances. The mere thought of inconstancy gives him inexpressible pain. Her mention of it must be his excuse for the document which accompanies this note. Could she but have witnessed the agitation under which it was framed, she would cease to wonder at his importunity. He begs her to summon all the pity in her nature to her aid before letting her eyes dwell upon the chill phraseology of an official communication wrested from him in a climax of desperation.

Mary can scarce credit the evidence of those eyes as she glances at the Prince's signature and the seal of the royal arms. But the poet burns through the solemn jargon of legal terminology in this amazing document sewn with the pearls and rubies of the royal lover's rhetoric. Could all the wealth of Indies shift the stars in heaven or still the motion of an aching heart? What bloodless statistician had ever pressed the exercise of his skill to the point of daring to estimate in money the price of the love that Paris felt for Helen of Troy? From flights like these the document made gentle descent to the flat levels of a solemn bond containing a promise to pay the sum of twenty thousand pounds on the Prince's coming of age.

Still Mary hesitates. Eagerly she takes the pearls and rubies of this strange poetry to cover from her conscience the naked spectacle of surrender. But the "promise to pay" leaves the sharp sting of mortified pride. Again she urges him to reflect upon the sorrow he will bring upon his royal father. Lord Malden shows little of his wonted composure when he brings

her the swift answer to this last appeal. The period of his humiliating office has stretched itself over months. This very morning the Duke of Cumberland has paid him an early visit and implored him to bring this matter to a happy issue : his nephew's peace of mind, he declares, is utterly undone, and his health so seriously undermined that the whole matter cannot for long be withheld from the King. "By your solicitude for my father," writes George Prince, "you stir in me the depths of an affection I had thought all but extinguished by the harshness of his conduct." The rest of the letter is all impatience for an interview already too long postponed.

At Malden's suggestion that she should visit the Prince in his apartments in the disguise of male attire, her delicacy recoils. The stage has not hardened her to the point of being insensible to the conventions of real life. His lordship is quick to repair the error of the proposal by another, involving their meeting at his own house in Dean Street, Mayfair. To this, George Prince demurs on the practical ground that it would be difficult for him to evade the vigilance of his tutor in venturing so far from the royal household. He is ready to risk all the consequences if she will come to Buckingham House. Of course she is too generous to be willing to involve him in such peril. From the exchange of fantastic epistles between Florizel and Perdita abounding in quotations from Shakespeare, their correspondence has now declined to a series of hasty notes from George Prince to Mrs. Robinson and from Mrs. Robinson to George Prince, notes in which the immediate necessity for agreement on a practicable plan has sent the Muses

flying. The words creep on all fours to their dry little conclusion. It is agreed that the Prince should meet Mrs. Robinson after dusk in the gardens of Kew.

Since the night of the third of December, Mary has played many new parts at Drury Lane Theatre. She has been Rosalind and Imogen. She has masqueraded on the stage as a page boy and as a nun in the desperate and successful attempt to convert a licentious suitor into a devout lover. She now bores Horace Walpole in a sentimental comedy written by a lady whose wit he admires and whom he sincerely pities for the badness of this performance. Has Mary lost her spirits? Or is Walpole's judgment at fault? It is now the end of May, and on this same evening she plays a dashing young Irish widow who assumes an exaggerated brogue and an unnatural activity in order to disgust a tiresome old suitor with a nervous horror of high spirits. Why do the words hang so heavily on her lips on this occasion? Has she not kept audiences at the fever point of merriment in the same rôle?

This was her last appearance on the stage, and the thought of past triumphs mingling with the sense of tremulous apprehension at what was to come, unnerved her. Several times in the course of the farce her words failed her, and the song in which she bade farewell, wishing and praying a full measure of joy to all as the curtain fell, was sung through a mist of tears.

XXIV

HISTORY is nowhere so articulate as in the silence of disused palaces, in which the tarnished gold epaulets of dead admirals, the bridal veil of a queen, the faded wool in a sampler mutely emphasise the tale of battles lost or won, royal bliss or pain in marriage, domestic industry or intellectual stagnation in a house of which the occupants have long passed away. Books lead us with heightened curiosity to the speechless relics in their glass cases ; but the spirit of the age which they embody, lives with a livelier, a more poignant significance in the things than in all that historians have written about them and their owners. When once we know what happened to Marie Antoinette, can all the volumes of M. Thiers, can even the eloquence of Burke do as much to quicken the image of her sorrows as the spectacle of her bedroom in the palace at Versailles ?

When George Prince was five years old, like other little boys he spent much time in trying to learn how to write. Is it the deliberate irony of the curator, or reverence for the tradition of monarchy, or chance, with a philosophy profounder than either, that has chosen to perpetuate the memory of this misguided son of a tragic father in a sheet from his copybook bearing in childish scrawl the words, "Conscious innocence"? It hangs in its frame on the wall of

the room in Kew Palace which afterwards became his mother's drawing-room when the Dutch House, as it was then called, was converted from a home for the young princes into a summer residence for their royal parents. Except for the portraits of George as Prince of Wales and as King, this scrap of handwriting is all that has been left in Kew Palace to tell the story of that life.

The house occupied by King George the Third and Queen Charlotte when they stayed, as they loved to do, during the Prince's minority at Kew, is no more in existence. It stood next to the Dutch House to which Lord Malden had arranged to conduct Mary Robinson for her first interview with the Prince. But to avoid arousing suspicion, they were to come after dark and to enter the gardens from the riverside through a gate in the old wall.

The night was warm and all June was in the leafy landscape which stretched from the high road of Brentford to the broad belt of the silver Thames. Towards six o'clock Lord Malden and Mary were ferried to the trim little island between Brentford and the gardens of the Dutch House. Their dinner at the inn passed almost in silence. Lord Malden was tired, melancholy, cynical in his reflections.

"The motto *Ich dien* should have been mine instead of the Prince's," said he, as he took his seat opposite Mary at the table. But she scarce heard what he was saying. The languorous beauty of the scene, the strangeness of her situation, the mixture of ease and punctilio in her companion made her reluctant to face the reality of her actions. Everything proceeded with the mechanical perfection of a stage performance.

Malden was the manager contriving the entrances and the exits. Lights glimmered in the palace across the water. Soon she would be within those walls ; all the hardness and the misery of her marriage would be blotted out in the shining happiness of this adventure. In the picture which rose to her imagination she saw the Prince seated in an attitude of pensive melancholy in some leafy bower of the gardens. At her approach he looks up. Malden disappears. Arm in arm the knight and the lady wander through the coolness of those groves.

When Malden and she had dined, they stood on a terrace and watched for the signal which was to summon them to the opposite shore of the river. Boats glided past them ; the sun's last shimmer departed from the surface of the water, and the clanking chain of their own boat moored beneath where they stood seemed to grow more persistent with the ebb of the tide which whispered and gurgled at their feet.

“Ich dien, ich dien,” murmured Malden impatiently, as he paced up and down, with his eyes fixed on the narrowing path across the river. It was growing so dark that he could scarcely distinguish the palace wall from the water which came almost to its edge.

Mary heard the cry of a waterfowl, low, plaintive, remote, making doubly sombre the succeeding stillness. The sound lingering in her ears roused a faint echo as of something familiar shrouded in a mystery of exquisite pain. Suddenly her eyes filled with tears at the thought of her child lying asleep in her cradle. Lord Malden touched her arm.

“Do you see something waving yonder ?” said he, as he pointed across the river. “It might be the

royal standard or a pocket handkerchief for aught I can tell."

Gazing along the line marked by his direction, she descried what looked like the thickening of mist into a tiny cloud that quivered for a moment and then disappeared. Slowly she nodded her head. Soon the water was rushing on both sides of her as Lord Malden rowed her across the river. It seemed as if they made no progress in their course, until as if by an independent motion of the boat she came smoothly alongside. They landed almost exactly opposite a tall iron gate, which her companion, drawing a key from his pocket, stealthily unlocked. In another moment they stood in the faint whiteness of a rising moon, and Mary became aware of two figures hastening from the dark end of a broad avenue of trees to their encounter. Muffled laughter, all the more joyous for its restraint, fell upon her ears.

"So you have come at last . . . Perdita," said the taller of the two figures, and all her fears vanished at the sound of his low, musical voice. As she looked up at the speaker, the irresistible sweetness of his smile linked the moment swiftly with that other when his eyes had pursued hers with their burning message as the curtain fell upon "*A Winter's Tale*."

"Diana herself was not more fair" he whispers fondly, and then, forgetting the dangers of discovery, laughs aloud at the restrictions put upon princes by their tutors. His brother and he have spent the afternoon in the study of Vauban's systems of fortification.

"All Vauban's skill is powerless," he cries, glancing merrily at his brother, "against a single dart from Cupid."

The Bishop of Osnaburgh turns uneasily from Lord Malden with whom he has been conversing.

“Take care, brother, this is no wire entanglement,” says he, and looks in the direction of Kew House, at which George laughs. So they hurl at each other the dry terms of fortification, giving them a comic twist in the ridicule of their application to this nocturnal adventure.

“The night affords a covered way for this lady,” says the Prince. But the Bishop points upwards at the sky and bids him extend his position beyond the range of yonder demilune.

“Brother Frederick is all prudence,” cries George, drawing Mary with him into the shadow cast by a neighbouring tree across the gravel walk.

“And brother George all folly,” answers the Bishop.

“Most reverend signior, if 'tis folly to pursue the fair, then I am fond indeed. What if this lady enchant me into oblivion of a kingdom? Must I for ever wear the frilled collar of a child?”

“Your Royal Highness——” interposed Lord Malden.

“My royal highness!” echoed the Prince, mimicking the accents of the speaker. “Talk rather to me of yonder royal highness,” and he in his turn points overhead to where the silvery pilot of the night is sailing high and valiant in a shoreless ocean of blue indigo. “At such a time the sound of titles grates on my ear. The frogs that croak in marshes make sweeter music. To-night I am no earthly heir to a throne, but Florizel, Prince Florizel. Call this encounter ‘Florizel’s folly’ if you will. I follow in

golden Apollo's footsteps. Safe in these shepherd's weeds, what cause have I to fear discovery?"

His long black coat buttoned to the chin mocked the description with an effect so comic, that Mary herself was swept into the tempest of laughter which overtook the others. The Prince laughed too, but a noise as of rapid footsteps approaching from the direction of the King's house reduced them to sudden silence.

"'Tis your buff coat," muttered Malden, glancing at the Bishop, "that has betrayed us. The rest of us are black as hell itself. But there is no time to lose. Come, Madam."

In less than a minute the iron gate in the wall of the palace gardens had closed noiselessly behind Lord Malden and Mary. As she looked back she saw the two brothers hastening up the avenue towards the Dutch House, while a group of figures bearing lighted torches hurried across the level greensward from the neighbourhood of the King's residence.

Malden was sullen and said nothing as he rowed Mary across the Thames to Brentford, nor was she tempted to ruffle the serenity of silence by conversation. For her, he was no more than a boatman linking the almost fabulous enchantment of that transitory bliss on one side of the river with the cold littleness of everyday life which awaited her on the other side.

Did this indeed await her? Or was this brief rapture but a prelude silenced by a mere whim of Fate at the sound of the first few notes, but silenced only to break forth anew into the longer rhapsody? Awe at the elevation of his rank could no longer exist for one whose hand had felt the fever of his lips in the hurried

business of departure. But half an hour ago she was still the martyred wife of a libertine husband. Now the martyrdom had slipped from her, and her shoulders were uneasy at the unfamiliarity of such freedom. As she was borne past the eyot between Kew and Brentford it lowered at her with mysterious significance. Was it not to mark for ever the boundary between the one life and the other? For in her simple mind the very geography of the circumstances assumed a shadowy importance at which she grasped in order to escape from the responsibility of examining her own actions outside the high light of romance.

At the outset she had determined by all the resources of her ingenuity to humble her royal suitor; but before she had exercised one half of her powers, behold, the youth had capitulated. Now, as the coach drove her from Brentford to Covent Garden, she was surprised to discover in herself a strong sentiment of gratitude that he had not compelled her to beat him to his knees. It was as if she had become indebted to him in a way as pleasing as it was unexpected, for as surely as she had hated Lord Lyttelton when he had connived at her ruin, she loved this George Prince, this headstrong youth who could cast aside the near responsibilities of a kingdom for the flowers in a lady's hat, this Florizel who could pursue a folly into the very region of history, undismayed by the warnings of professional advocates of repectability and prudence.

On his way up the avenue of trees leading to the Dutch House the Prince suddenly stopped his brother.

“Listen,” said he, and they both paused to hear the nightingale warble in a river of rich notes. The

bird sang as though that evening would never wear to morning.

“This music,” cries Florizel, “is harsh, crabbed, unsympathetic to the ear soothed with the voice of Perdita. If the King lets you go abroad, Frederick, do not stay for me. The skies of Italy and France cannot match the light in the eyes of this British beauty.”

He turned to look down the avenue across the river, and the lantern on the boat conveying Mary to the opposite shores shone faintly at him, a glimmering speck on the water. The wave of his hand with which he greeted it as he disappeared with his brother within the walls of the Dutch House resembled more a salutation than a farewell. It was entirely destitute of “conscious innocence,” but as a salutation it was worthy of the morning star itself.

XXV

THE briefness no less than the enchantment of this first interview sets wings to the feet of Prince Florizel's desires. He is advised even now not to act too precipitately. But of what avail are the counsels of his brother and Lord Malden now that his first thought as he wakes is of Perdita—not the wilful quean of the stage as he had begun to think her, but the artless woman who for the first time comes into the life of a boy to touch a vanity that is bottomless. The misfortune of her marriage shines at him from her eyes with a sadness making her doubly adorable. When at last she passes up the avenue of those gardens within the walls of the Dutch House, "You are like the moonlight," he cries, "stealing into the darkness of a dungeon."

What could they gain by further postponement? Are not the pens of gazetteers and caricaturists already busy with the embroidery of their romance? Do not these very hieroglyphs of satire and invective add zest to the passion which they ridicule? "'Tis all so different from what they paint it," is George Prince's enraptured comment. The interviews at Kew grow more frequent. Florizel has a pretty voice, and lets it sound into the night when the good King and Queen are fast asleep and dreaming that all their care and solicitude for the

upbringing of the young princes are turning them into "useful examples worthy of imitation."

Mary leaves her house in Covent Garden for one in Cork Street. With characteristic agility she rises to the splendour of her new station. Du Barry herself was not more reckless in her expenditure. Her equipage is the talk of the town. Here is its description in a magazine of the period: "The body is of carmelite and silver ornamented with a French mantle and the cypher in a wreath of flowers; the carriage scarlet and silver, the seat cloth richly ornamented with silver fringe. Mrs. Robinson's livery is green faced with yellow, and richly trimmed with broad silver lace, the harness ornamented with stars of silver richly chased and elegantly finished. The inside of the carriage is lined with white silk embellished with scarlet trimmings."

What wonder that she is often obliged to wait for hours in a shop before the crowd which gathers round this vehicle can be dispersed? Florizel's generosity is boundless. The Duke of Cumberland is delighted at his nephew's conduct. Here is a son capable indeed of teaching that obdurate father a lesson. Like a circus master cracking his long whip to give encouragement to the young débütant in the arena, the Duke applauds each new impulse to folly in the Prince. Since Cumberland's marriage the King has never spoken with his brother, and the Duke still smarts under the sting inflicted upon him and his wife in the Royal Marriages Act. But Prince Florizel shall bend the majesty of that stern brother to breaking point. What sharper instrument could the unscrupulous Duke choose to wound the proud father than his rebellious son? "He shall curse the day on which

he set his signature to that bill," cries this unforgiving brother. So he sets up a faro table at Cumberland House and entices the Prince to gamble to his heart's content. What need "Taffy" (as he affectionately calls his royal nephew) care for debts, since either papa or the people must eventually pay them? Such is the way in which this sponsor fulfils his duties towards his godson.

Florizel finds his uncle good company, and is ready enough to follow his counsel. So Mary keeps two blackamoors to hold torches for her, and the hall of her house in Cork Street is lined with a retinue of liveried servants. If George the Third cared little for "boetry and bainting," his son would show that he was a patron of the Muses. He commissions one portrait after another of his Perdita. In the first, at the request of His Royal Highness, two doves are to be included, in allusion to Florizel's words in the play: "So turtles pair that never meant to part." The turtles look sheepish enough to this day even for the satisfaction of royalty, but the portrait is a Mary much maligned, reclining on a classical sofa near a marble bath. Fairer, infinitely fairer records than this of the Russian courtier Stroehling have come down to us in the canvases of Gainsborough and Romney where the lady's beauty fits her like a glove. From one studio to another she drives to exercise the skill and fill the pockets of the master painters, from Cavendish Square to Bentinck Street where young John Thomas Smith is serving his apprenticeship as an engraver under Sherwin. The boy never forgot that lovely apparition for something that happened one morning when she called with her mother, and Sherwin



From a photograph by W. Mansell & Co. of the picture in the Wallace collection by George Romney, R.A.

MARY ROBINSON.



was out. "Do find your master's drawing for me and I will reward you, my little fellow," she said. He looked at her as if he would cross the Alps to fetch a flower for her, and ran upstairs humming a refrain from *Love in a Village*: "With a kiss and a kiss, I'll reward you with a kiss." On his return with the picture she took him at his word, and the boy blushed scarlet, although the kiss was as innocent as those with which the Duchess of Devonshire supplicated the votes and stole the hearts of the butchers to win Mr. Fox his election.

Because the love of George Prince and Mary had crossed the Rubicon of romance and entered upon the territory of a substantial relation, it is not to be assumed that their ardour for each other's company abates. As yet there is no prospect of a joint establishment. They write as many letters to each other as before, and the fringe of a poetic inspiration still flutters in the signatures: Florizel and Perdita. But in the place of poetry is the prose of daily, almost hourly solicitude for each other's bodily welfare. The Muses have descended with a bump.

In one letter the Prince is so distraught that he forgets his own imaginary name. As if to recover from so humiliating a lapse from his earlier and more Olympian style, he writes the next letter in French and signs the name in his own blood. He implores her not to risk her life by riding too fiery a horse in Hyde Park. In her reply she begs him not to overheat himself at the Pantheon by cotillons and allemandes, but to stick to minuets and light country dances. They exchange gossip on the clubs, on the powers of Mrs. Siddons as an actress, on the stupidity

of a masked Ridotto for which he has sent her tickets. "Stupid indeed," he writes, "was last night's entertainment, but stupidity is the rage, the influenza of the times." Cheerfully he babbles of a drunken escapade at Lord Chesterfield's house at Blackheath, in which he has stumbled and hurt his leg. She is distressed beyond measure to hear of this accident, and cannot rest until she has been reassured as to the progress of his recovery.

The splendour of his gifts rises as the splendour of his prose sinks. He sends her his portrait in miniature by Cosway together with an eager acceptance of her invitation to *eat a bit of dinner* at the Star and Garter in Richmond. If she is there before him, let her order the dinner. To save her the embarrassment of making a choice of dishes he tells her he is cloyed with fricassees, ragouts and the like, and longs to *take a touch* at the roast beef of old England, for in spite of his parentage he is an Englishman every inch of him. On the subject of dress he is minutely particular, and describes at length a new shoebuckle which he has invented; it is more generous than any yet made, and follows the curve of the foot on either side in loops of diamond paste. She is to share the distinction of introducing this daring innovation to the fashionable world with himself; for a pair is to be ordered at once for her if she will correct any inaccuracy in his memory of the size of her foot. In shoe-heels he follows the example set by Mr. Fox in his early dandy period, but for the scarlet of the statesman he substitutes a salmon pink. He distresses her à propos of Mr. Fox by the expression of a jealous suspicion. What is this story that has reached him of a new *vis-à-vis*

presented to her by subscription raised at Brookes's in connexion with a sum of money in dispute at the gaming table? "Can Florizel be jealous?" she replies in high perturbation. "Great Heaven, is such a thing possible?" The story is a base fabrication for which, she doubts not, some underlying political motive may be discovered. True, she has bought a *vis-à-vis*, and the beauty of the device on the panels of the carriage has aroused universal interest wherever she has driven in it. He should beware, however, of the stories that emanate from Brookes's; for this club is full, not of his enemies but of his friends who seek to widen the breach between him and his father and might well be glad to have it supposed that their Whig principles carried them even into the doubtful policy of paying a compliment to Perdita.

Her attitude towards his father perplexes George Prince. She will not hear a word in his disfavour, and frequently she laments the circumstances which must place her in an odious light before His Majesty. When the admission fires him with a new protest against the army of official formalities which check him from the public avowal of his alliance with her, she finds excuses for all of them. George, with the Duke of Cumberland at the back of him, is all for throwing in his lot unreservedly with the Opposition, but Mary resents the notion that he should be made the political dupe of his own unfilial sentiments. She takes a delight in mitigating the ferocity of these sentiments whenever he gives expression to them. Queen Charlotte herself could not have lectured her wilful son to better purpose, and as for the King, the imagination recoils at the thought of what he would have said and done, could

he have heard his own views so often and so sincerely expressed by the woman with whose name his son's was so shamefully associated.

The last person to exhibit any weakness in dealing with this stubborn son was his still more stubborn father, whose passion for prerogative reached its height (and met too with its fall) in his parental relation with a young man secured to a large extent by the very circumstances of his birth and prospects from the obligation of showing that subservience which many fathers find it comparatively easy to exact from their children. Other people might be influenced by personal interest, or cajoled by an undeniable charm in the Prince's presence and manner of address into a lenient view of his character, but George the Third prided himself on his knowledge of this son's character and opposed what he regarded as its tendencies to evil with a zeal as fanatical as it was pious. Did the Heir-apparent, like other young men of his acquaintance, sigh after the recreations of Paris and propose a visit to the French capital, the King was at once ready with the counter-suggestion of Hanover. When the Ministers proposed a sum of money on the Prince's establishment, papa whips out documents at once to show that half the amount will do.

But as yet the establishment is a thing of the future, for Florizel is only eighteen on the twelfth of August in the year 1780, and there is still left a year in which to curb his aspirations to independence. Both the father and the son looked to the later date as a crisis in the battle between them, and the Ministers were already falling into ranks on the one side or the other. As a preliminary to the full establishment, it

was now proposed to give the Prince a separate suite of apartments in Buckingham House.

Mary followed the negotiations on foot with the keenness of one closely interested in their satisfactory issue. Had she been the desperate courtesan which her enemies sought to represent her, she would have goaded the Prince and his adherents into making the most extravagant demands. As it was, she took every opportunity of discountenancing an attitude of defiance. If she was unable by the nature of the circumstances to evade the obloquy showered upon her as the mistress of the Prince, she did not despair of exercising, at some future date, the influence of a princess, or even, if fate willed it so, of a queen. It was fifteen years since the King had alarmed everybody by entering into a conversation with an oak-tree in the course of a drive through Windsor Forest, but his health was known to be precarious, and the disappointments of the American War had sadly impaired his spirits. Who could tell how soon the responsibilities of sovereignty might pass from the father to the son?

In the meantime everything that tended to regularise her relationship with the Prince exalted her own position. At times she would try to picture herself as the mother of his children; not that they would ever usurp the place which the little Maria held in her affections. Even on the little girl's account she had welcomed the change in her life which finally separated her from a husband whose very presence was an outrage on the innocence of childhood. So when Mary is not writing to the Prince or driving to Richmond to keep an appointment with him, when

she tires of sitting for her portrait and seeks repose in the glittering solitude of her house in Cork Street, she often turns for recreation to the amateur game of playing at mamma, teasing and fondling the child with an artless persistence which raises a smile on the wan face of Mrs. Darby, who is utterly perplexed by the apparent contradictions in the composition of her daughter's character.

The Duke of Cumberland is delighted at the tempest of scandal now raging about Florizel and Perdita in waves so high as to make it impossible for the King any longer to affect ignorance of the matter, but he is disappointed with Mrs. Robinson herself ; a retired actress had no right to that air of disdain ; her morals he regarded as squeamish : not good enough for the stern demands of perfect propriety, not bad enough to make her company an excuse for merriment. He thought her stupid too, for what, he asked himself, could she hope to gain by her misguided attempt to spare his royal brother some of the humiliation in which her own alliance with the Prince was bound to involve him ? To satisfy his own vindictive spite, one woman was as good as another to entangle his nephew and humble his brother's pride, provided she realised her own powers for making things uncomfortable, and exercised them. But Mrs. Robinson did neither, and the worst of it was, that "Taffy" still believed himself deeply in love with her, and fondly maintained that she had permanent claims upon his consideration. If only the silly youth could be persuaded out of the arms of this milk-and-water enchantress into those of a more spirited and less scrupulous substitute !

XXVI

By enlarging the Prince's liberty in small instalments even before he came legally of age, the King hoped to diminish the force of the claim which that young gentleman would inevitably make, as soon as he was in a position to do so. From the guarded seclusion of the Dutch House (for so he thought it) to the dignity of a small separate establishment in Buckingham House was a handsome preliminary measure, and would cost very little if the Prince used, as it was intended he should use, the King's servants. That his son should occupy a separate establishment altogether was an idea repugnant to George the Third, who wished to have him as long as possible under the parental eye. If the King could dodge each fresh demand by the concession of another wing in his own palace, he would be satisfied.

But the commercial conduct of this father, inspired as it was by the highest motives, neither deceived nor conciliated his clever son. On the contrary, it inflamed his resentment all the more. What was the use of being Prince of Wales, Duke of Cornwall, Hereditary Steward of Scotland, Duke of Rothsay, Earl of Carrick, Baron of Renfrew, and a variety of other historical and ornamental things, if you could not enjoy the company of a lady at supper in your own house without being taken to task by papa and

mamma? He had long been accustomed to wear the Star on his breast, and the Garter had shone upon his leg ever since he was a child of three years old, but of what value was the brightness of either star or garter, compared with the lights of the Star and Garter at Richmond on a summer evening? And so long as he lived in the immediate neighbourhood of the King it would always be easy for His Majesty to invent some public business to keep him away from his private pleasures.

But the secrecy to which he is pledged in public as a consequence of his rank adds zest to the private indulgence of George Prince's love for Mary. Something of the actor's enjoyment of impersonation is stimulated in him by this alliance with an actress. His official life, he tells her, is a mere puppet show from which he flies in his leisure moments to the sweeter reality of her presence. What is the heat of all the thirty-six fires that are blazing at one moment in London through the folly of Lord George Gordon, compared with the heat of Florizel's passion for his Perdita? One of these burning buildings is the prison in which Mary had languished with her incorrigible husband. Were the fates conspiring to extinguish all memory of that period of sorrow and shame? Except for the death of Grandmamma Elizabeth, the year 1780 was for her aspiring granddaughter a record of pure gaiety unstained by regret.

On the first of January 1781 George Prince receives his first instalment of that establishment over which his father deals in so niggardly a spirit. He is still a long way from the possession of Carlton House, but it is something to have a separate suite of apart-

ments in Buckingham House, and he wears an air of increased insolence as he appears at court in a pink silk coat with white cuffs.

Pink is the Prince's favourite colour, and he wears it again at the Royal Ball at St. James's on the fourth of June in celebration of the King's birthday. Such a crowd assembled in the courtyard of the palace to see His Royal Highness's new coach on this occasion that it had to be dispersed with the aid of constables. It is in their equipages that the extravagant fancies of Florizel and Perdita paint themselves in glowing hues. The Prince's carriage was lined with rose velvet and hung round with curtains of rose satin richly fringed with gold festoons. The harness was of blue leather edged with red and stitched with white, and the horses wore scarlet ribbons and monstrous plumes of feathers on their heads.

It was a busy day for the Royal Family. King and Queen, Princes and Princesses, the big ones as well as the little ones, awoke to the sound of the bells that ushered in the festive occasion. At noon the Park and Tower guns were fired, and at one the family were assembled in the Grand Council Chamber to hear recited the Ode in celebration of the King's Birthday. The Drawing-Room afterwards was more crowded than it had been for some years past, the dresses of the ladies, in the language of the chronicler, being "both rich and elegant"; and it was difficult indeed to decide who cut the lovelier figure, the Duchess of Hamilton in her lemon-coloured gown trimmed with stripe tissue, silver and pink foil, or Lady Melbourne in sea green and silver with her fanciful embroidery of flowers. By six o'clock the

Drawing-Room was over, and papa, mamma, and the children dined at the palace. George Prince bored himself even more than usual at the family table, for on this occasion he was obliged to appear punctually. But he drank plenty of champagne, and yet not enough to incapacitate him, as it did his brother William on a similar occasion, from opening the ball by a minuet with his sister.

Mary watched him from her place in the chamberlain's box to which she had been introduced at a request of the Prince himself. She could afford to feel elated at the distinction thus conferred upon her ; for with the exception of Mrs. Armstead and one or two other ladies who sported carriages of their own, the amorous squadron of beauties who had thought to catch a glimpse of the Prince on his way to court, by taking up a position in a hackney coach in St. James's Street, had all been outwitted by the simple order that no common vehicles were to be admitted to the street. The party of constables placed at either end of it to attend faithfully to the execution of this order had enjoyed many a pretty joke at the expense of the disappointed fair.

But now it is nine o'clock and the musicians launch a phrase or two into this brilliant company, as if to scare into a whisper the loud hum of gossip by a warning that the earnest business of dancing is about to begin. Soon afterwards the Prince enters the room and pays his compliments to several of the nobility. A lady takes two rosebuds from her bouquet and presents them to the Prince. Their colour is marvellously in accord with that of His Royal Highness's coat. Mary notes the carelessness of his manner as

he acknowledges the gift, and then, with a glance first in her direction and then in another part of the circle, beckons a gentleman to whom he gives the rosebuds with a message. A minute or two later this gentleman enters the chamberlain's box: the rosebuds are for Mary. She places them in her bosom, and, acting indifference, feels a high exaltation at this public humiliation of a rival. The Duke of Cumberland enters the ballroom soon after his nephew. The loose swagger of his deportment offers a marked contrast to the grave carriage of his brother the King, who enters with the Queen and the Princess Royal. A few minutes are spent by their Majesties in conversation with the nobility and the foreign ambassadors in the circle, before their eldest son and daughter step into the middle of the room to walk their minuet.

The Prince's dancing was masterly; it combined exquisite precision with careless elegance; it mingled princely condescension with musical abandon; it was grave, gay—a blank-verse tragedy, a satire in motion. Every one was delighted at the brotherly solicitude with which he followed the slightly embarrassed progress of his sister through the figures. This was the first time the Princess Royal had walked in public, and an occasional slip in memory or execution was skilfully covered each time by the address of His Royal Highness. The second minuet was danced by the Duke of Cumberland and Lady Parker, but the Duke's style was inferior to his nephew's, and Lady Parker's skilled affectation was a tiresome spectacle after the girlish performance of the Princess Royal. Minuets were danced until eleven o'clock, and few indeed were the pairs who escaped criticism in that critical company.

The most laughable episode, however, in this portion of the evening was introduced by Colonel North, who in the step to the left accidentally trod upon the King's toes. For a moment it looked as if he must either tumble into the lap of majesty or fall flat on his face, but by a desperate effort he contrived to balance his person without doing either. No sooner, however, had he saved the situation than its absurdity struck him with such overwhelming force that, as a wit observed, his face looked like the tomb of laughter just before the resurrection.

Country dances began at half-past eleven, and when three figures had been performed, their Majesties and the Princess Royal retired, the splendour of the ladies in their white and fawn silver tissue with the diamonds in their bows and sleeve-knots showing bravely in immediate contiguity with the stone-coloured silk coat of His Majesty, who always adopted the plain style on these occasions. Mary's view of the King and Queen on this evening strengthened her prepossession in their favour. She had a weakness for good people, and the goodness of this mother and father shone in the depths of the King's keen eyes, and in that look of suffering patience and ardent tenderness in those of his wife. How long would it be before they came to know that the woman who had succumbed to the charms of their son was no desperate adventuress, but an ill-starred lady upon whom fate had cast a responsibility all the wider in its influence for being undefined by custom? Although in age she was but a few years the Prince's senior, in experience and a knowledge of people her royal lover was by comparison a mere stripling. Again and again she had

warned him to be more circumspect in the manner of his attentions to her in public. But whether it was at the King's hunt near Windsor, or at a review of the troops, or at a theatre, he took an especial pleasure in distinguishing her from the rest of the company in a way that courted criticism. The daily prints expended much ingenuity in allusive paragraphs, in which the scurrilous note gathered force as the days advanced. This was the golden age of libels and lampoons. The art of innuendo was at its height, and in comparison with the things that were hinted at concerning his intrigues, George Prince was indeed an angel of light. Even good Queen Charlotte was suspected of an attempt to equip her son with a German mistress.

When Mary left the palace on this night of the ball she was conscious, through all the glittering impression made by the scene, of a sentiment of disquiet. The Duke of Cumberland had eyed her maliciously as he sat cooling himself with the Prince and a few ladies after the heat of the dancing. What did that look portend? The grossness of his person was emphasised by his neighbourhood to the Prince. Mary wondered what in his uncle's nature her dainty Florizel could find to attract him. She pitied the King for his relationship with such a brother. Her disquiet did not, however, proceed from this source alone. She had seen the Duchess of Devonshire at the ball, but somehow had been unable to attract her notice. To have missed a greeting from that lovable woman pained her. She had not forgotten what she owed the great lady. Had the Duchess forgotten? It was easy not to see any one person in that crowded assemblage, with its perpetual movement and rapid change of interests

from one topic to another. But the Duchess had not danced. She had remained as stationary in her place as Mary in hers throughout the evening. Was it mere inadvertence which caused her to stare vacantly into the air whenever Mary's glance alighted upon her? Or was the apparent inadvertence of her manner a veil to conceal some deeper instinct of aversion? At the mere shaping of this supposition Mary felt the sharp twinge of humiliation. But Lord Malden puts a billet into her hands just as her coach is about to drive her from the palace. It is from the Prince. She reads it by the flickering light of the carriage lanterns as she is borne swiftly to Cork Street. He longs, so he writes, to fly from the tedious masquerade of the ball to more congenial company. Yet he fears an escape to-night is fraught with too much difficulty. He mentions an early date for another meeting at Kew. Those gardens are his Elysian Fields. The note closes with a warning. He is consumed with jealousy, for word has been brought him that she has been seen at Ranelagh and Vauxhall in the company of a Colonel, a Lord, a Duke. The mere thought of another drinking at the fountain of her beauty fills him with rage, despair, madness.

XXVII

THE lock of the iron gates in the palace wall clicked ever so slightly. Prince Florizel turned an ear in the direction of the sound. He had been leaning on the rail of the balcony at the back of the Dutch House. Brother Frederick was away. He missed his company, and yet the house seemed more to belong to him for the silence that reigned in it. The royal nursery was in another part of Kew. It was but a fortnight from his nineteenth birthday. As he gazed across the river it was not of Mary that he was thinking, but of Mrs. Armstead, whose face had beamed upon him from her yellow chariot as he had driven to St. James's Palace on the King's birthday nearly a month ago. It was curious, he reflected, how insistent had been the memory of that face. He had asked his uncle about her on the night of the birthday ball, when they had stayed to cool themselves after the others had left ; but the Duke had been reticent, had looked as if he could say more if he would, and had even turned the conversation to the Earl of Buckingham's new pea-green and silver coat, an unusual extravagance in the meanest peer of the realm.

Mary stood alone in the avenue, with the beauty of that starlight night about her. She had rowed herself across the river, having persuaded the Prince much against his will to lend her the key of the gate.

They had nearly quarrelled on this subject, and it was he who on this occasion had talked of circumspection. Suppose the key should be found on her person? But she had shaken the portrait of His Royal Highness in miniature at him. "I carry this always about me. Have I not the key to your heart," said she, "and would you refuse me the key to your garden gate?" She was tired of these official meetings under the conduct of Lord Malden, and even hinted that the messenger would be ready enough to betray his trust. So he had yielded. But even as he hastened once more to her encounter, the memory of Mrs. Armstead lingered with him, and he indulged the pleasing fancy that it was she and not Mary who was waiting for him in the gardens.

"Enchanting Perdita!" he exclaimed, as he kissed her.

She repudiated the name.

"Perdita no more. I have done with the stage."

"Yet I must go down to history as Prince Florizel."

She laughed softly, and, speaking as if to herself, cried: "History! What history will ever tell the story of my love for you?"

The music of her voice fell upon his ears like a peal of bells ringing far down in the unfathomable depths of her heart.

"The time will come," said he bitterly, "when they will want to marry me to some German Princess."

"But you will refuse," said Mary quickly.

He looked fondly at her. Had his father refused, when his mother had been selected from the stock of marriageable German Princesses with the aid of a diplomat who reported on their respective merits?



From a mezzotint by Charles Howard Hodges, after the picture by Sir Joshua Reynolds, P.R.A.

GEORGE PRINCE OF WALES.

That they loved each other and provided a pattern of domestic virtue for their subjects was no justification in the eyes of this rebellious son who hated the mere thought that he was the offspring of such a union. It was all very well to send him to church and expatriate upon the laws of government, but what system of religion or of good government could sanctify the excellence of such principles of monarchical business?

“I wonder,” continued Mary, content to forego an answer to her question, “I wonder what kind of King you will make.”

George laughed.

“I will be a poet King,” he said. “I will complete the promise of my grandfather’s short life. He died like an artist in the arms of his dancing master, more kingly, though a prince, than my father or his. My tutors tell me little of him, but they cannot silence the blood in my veins; which tells me beauty must be my lodestar. When I was born they made a portrait model of me in wax. It lies in my mother’s bedroom in a case of glass on a crimson cushion. I will outlive this insult to my person, for the thing is frightful. I could be sick each time I see it. Some day I will steal the figure from its case and put a sausage and some sauerkraut in its place.”

“A royal joke,” cried Mary, laughing—“and the effigy? What will you do with it?”

“Stick pins into it and burn it,” he answered gaily. “But first we will have a banquet in honour of the occasion, with solemn speeches and champagne. Malden shall thrust the thing into the flames, and as it melts and bubbles we will drink a toast to the imperishable glory of Venus.”

“A poet King,” murmured Mary as they shut the moonlight from behind them and stood in the intimate seclusion of the Dutch House, in a silent corridor of which the darkness took the shape of a beckoning finger.

The clamorous twittering and fluting of the birds in Kew had risen almost to its climax under the early morning light when Mary in her dark-coloured habit stole down the avenue and stepped into the boat lying where she had left it moored a few paces distant from the iron gate in the palace wall. Never had summer sunrise told its tale of mysterious beauty in more perfect accents to the woman rowing herself with affectionate slowness across the gleaming bosom of the river. A silvery mist was rising from the long sloping gardens that fringed the waterside at Brentford. To Mary it seemed like a silken veil miraculously lifted from the face of the sleeping landscape by hands working to effect her entire surrender to the loveliness of her impressions. As she neared the shore the dizzy music of the lark fell from on high in an exquisite marriage of sound with the babble of water round the boat. 'Twas as if the sunlight itself were singing in the streaming tide of jubilant sweetness that poured from the roofless blue of an unwrinkled heaven.

XXVIII

FOR almost the first time in recent years the Duke of Cumberland and his royal brother were striving towards the same end. The Prince's infatuation for this Mrs. Robinson must be checked, and without further delay. For it was highly inexpedient that she should associate herself with the new establishment, of which a further extension must be conceded soon after the nineteenth birthday of His Royal Highness on the twelfth of August. The hopes of the Duke were anchored in the charms of Mrs. Armistead, in whom unwary Florizel had already betrayed an interest that might well be exploited in the present dilemma. This lady could be trusted to show no cowardly sentiment towards the King, and thus the Opposition would secure the whole-hearted allegiance of the Prince.

With the King, the affair assumed an entirely different aspect. He had hoped vainly that the flames of this passion would consume themselves before it should become necessary, in the public interest, to take an active part in suppressing a scandal which burned like a wound in his injured affection for his wayward son. Was it for this, that he had fought the hard-won battle of purity and piety in his domestic life against the vicious precedents of his own ancestors and the prevailing immorality of his own nobility? Was this son to drag him face downwards through the city of

his own hopes and earnest aspirations as a great and benevolent sovereign, a spectacle of idle grief and humiliation for his people to pity or mock at? That George was impetuous, he knew, and, in spite of that parental sternness which never unbent in a son's presence, could forgive. That he was horribly, dangerously extravagant, was a crime for which the responsibility did not rest alone on those young shoulders. That he should show an utter disregard for the feelings of his mother in the effrontery with which he lent colour to the most impudent innuendoes made about him concerning his liaison with this actress, was a fact that made of this young man a creature monstrous, unnatural, devoid of human goodness of soul. "He might have hit me in any point but this," he reflected miserably, "and I should have felt the blow less keenly."

But George the Third was not the man to indulge in a luxury of regret without doing anything. There were moments when the sordid rôle that the circumstances thrust upon him, filled him with a disgust so overwhelming, that he wondered how he could summon courage, he who lacked it not in other directions, to proceed any farther in this business. But these circumstances became more and more exacting in their demands upon him. He was entirely out of touch with the inner life of his son, and lacked imagination to such a degree that he would have failed to understand what anybody meant who would speak to him of this inner life. A narrower intellect never crippled the aspirations of a good man. Father and son hardly ever spoke to each other. This situation tugged at the very roots of their different natures. The King devoutly hoped for a settlement without the painful,

and, he feared, the futile necessity of a personal conversation on the subject with the Prince.

Lieutenant-Colonel Hotham assured His Majesty that such an interview might be avoided if the conduct of the affair were entrusted to him. He knew Lord Malden and was aware also that this was an auspicious moment for approaching the Prince, whose affections were less deeply centred in the lady than everybody had feared. The King gave his assent to a preliminary investigation of his son's attitude, and Hotham retired to confer with Lord Malden.

Malden laughed when the matter was laid before him. "'Tis as good as settled," said he. "For the Prince is already throwing his pocket-handkerchief to another."

But Hotham was precise : the wires of this entanglement must be snapped. It was a case for action, specific, drastic, immediate : the whole matter must be finally arranged before the twelfth of August. Malden hummed dubiously. Too much zeal might spoil the issue. After some debate he agreed to consult the Prince and urge him to an express renunciation of the lady ; but he disliked hurry, and harped on the folly of too precipitate action.

His first step was to visit the Duke of Cumberland, who took the liveliest interest in these proceedings. The Duke swore loudly that he would not exert his influence with the Armstead until the Prince had warned the Robinson off the field. It must be Malden's melancholy office to persuade his nephew to write the necessary letter, which should be brief, deliberate, merciless in its insistence on a final separation.

George Prince lay on a sofa when Malden was ushered into his presence. He had been bled by a surgeon twice within the last twenty-four hours.

“How now?” said he languidly, rolling his eyes in his visitor’s direction.

Lord Malden apologised for the intrusion and expressed anxiety for the state of His Royal Highness’s health, while secretly rejoicing in an indisposition which might tend to weaken resistance to the proposal he had come to make. As soon as he ventured upon the topic of Mrs. Robinson the Prince stopped him.

“Talk not of her,” said he in an irritable voice. “My dream is of to-morrow. Poison it not with yesterday’s remembrance. Do I look ill, Malden?”

“I have seen your Royal Highness look better.”

“Tis not enough. I would look as though I were dying. These cheeks should be wan with unsatisfied desire. A woman’s love is born of pity.”

He raised a hand-mirror on a table at his side and cast it from him with the appropriate gesture of a skilled actress. “Not even to know her favourite colour,” he continued in a peevish voice, “and every one is so afraid to enlighten me. Tell me, Malden, what is it, what is it in a face that whips the appetite of man like a flail? To-day I am well, my spirits sing within me. A face glances at me through some coach window as I drive. Of a sudden down go the blinds of merriment. Who is she? What does she? Where lives she? To-morrow I am grave as a tomb-stone. My stomach sickens at wine. The dice bore me. I cannot read, I cannot write. What do I know of her? Her name and nothing more. What is her name? Armstead. A sound. Two linked syllables

that mean nothing. She may come from the gutter or the Milky Way. I know not. I care not. Malden," cried the Prince, observing a gleam of recognition in his visitor's eyes, "you know something of her. You can inform me where she lives. Speak, man, speak."

Lord Malden looked on the ground as he muttered, "She was once waiting-woman to the actress Mrs. Abington."

The Prince jumped up from the sofa.

"Tell me more, more," cried he.

But Malden waved him off.

"There is the yesterday," said he, "as well as the morrow. First write to Mrs. Robinson. Cut for ever the knot of yesterday's remembrance before you look upon to-morrow's sunrise."

The Prince seated himself at his writing-table and took up a pen.

"Poor Perdita!" said he, "poor Perdita! What can I write, Malden?"

Lord Leporello hummed.

"Your Royal Highness errs on the side of chivalry," said he. "This lady will have consolations. She is resourceful, has many friends. To hint at reasons why you must meet no more would be sufficient to satisfy curiosity and silence protest."

"Poor Perdita!" said the Prince again, as he handed Malden the letter.

"Your presence is earnestly hoped for to-night at Cumberland House," said Lord Leporello. "His Grace has matters of importance to communicate to you. Mrs. Armstead will be of the company."

When he left the Prince, Malden stood for a few

moments in the street. He had no intention of delivering the letter himself. Would it be safe to entrust it to a linkman? Finally he decided to walk well away from the neighbourhood of Buckingham House. He was careful in the choice of messengers and never entrusted two letters to the same man. When he had walked for half an hour, he began to scrutinise the lean individuals skulking in doorways on the look-out for an errand. Indulging the humorous fancy that one of them so strongly resembled in features Tom Robinson himself as to make his fitness for this errand cynically appropriate, he paused to assure himself that the man was not in fact the husband of Perdita, and then gave him half a crown, with instructions to take the letter immediately to Cork Street.

XXIX

IT was nearly dark when Mary, accompanied only by a boy postillion, set out in a small pony phaeton to drive from London to Windsor, where the Prince was staying a few days before the ball to be held in the Castle in honour of his nineteenth birthday. Two letters from her to her lover had remained unanswered. In the first she demanded, in the second she begged, an explanation of this cruel, inexplicable conduct. That she had enemies she knew, but that their malice could have poisoned the Prince's mind to her ruin within the space of two little days seemed incredible. The melody of that last meeting at Kew was still sounding in her heart when all its harmonies were dislocated by the harsh discord of his singular message.

“I must see him—I must see him,” she kept on repeating to herself, as the ponies trotted through this August night. The postillion was a gay little fellow who sang as he rode, and cracked his whip at the shooting stars, but his merriment seemed to add lead to her despair as they sped along. Save for an occasional outburst of jealousy, nothing had marred the serenity of those two years. And to be jealous, she reflected, was a lover's privilege. Tears started to her eyes as she remembered how once he had taxed her with some fancied indiscretion. For answer she had laughed in his arms. “You never look so handsome

as when you show your teeth," he had cried, and then she had vowed, rather than give him pain, to keep her mouth pinned up, that not a smile should escape her in the presence of others.

The innkeeper at Hounslow, where they stopped to feed the ponies, told her that for the past ten nights every carriage which had crossed the Heath had been attacked and rifled. She cared nothing. Her father's adventurous spirit rose within her at the thought of a desperate encounter. Fancy pictured the footpad trying to throttle her that he might steal the jewelled stud in her black stock. She remembered some verses of her own, written in depression while she was still distracted by the contending claims of passion and duty when first the Prince had wooed her. In them she had written of death as no foe, but a welcome messenger bringing the passport to a long repose. "Unthink these lines," the Prince had said to her, when in the beginning of their happiness she had shown them to him; and until now they had slept in her memory. The innkeeper was astonished, dismayed, at the obstinacy with which she ordered the ponies to be put in harness, and he shook his head apprehensively as the phaeton disappeared into the night. But although an attempt was made to stop the carriage as it neared the middle of the Heath, the nimble postillion turned so sharply, as a dash was made at the reins, that the ruffian missed his grasp and they were able to pursue their journey in safety to its end.

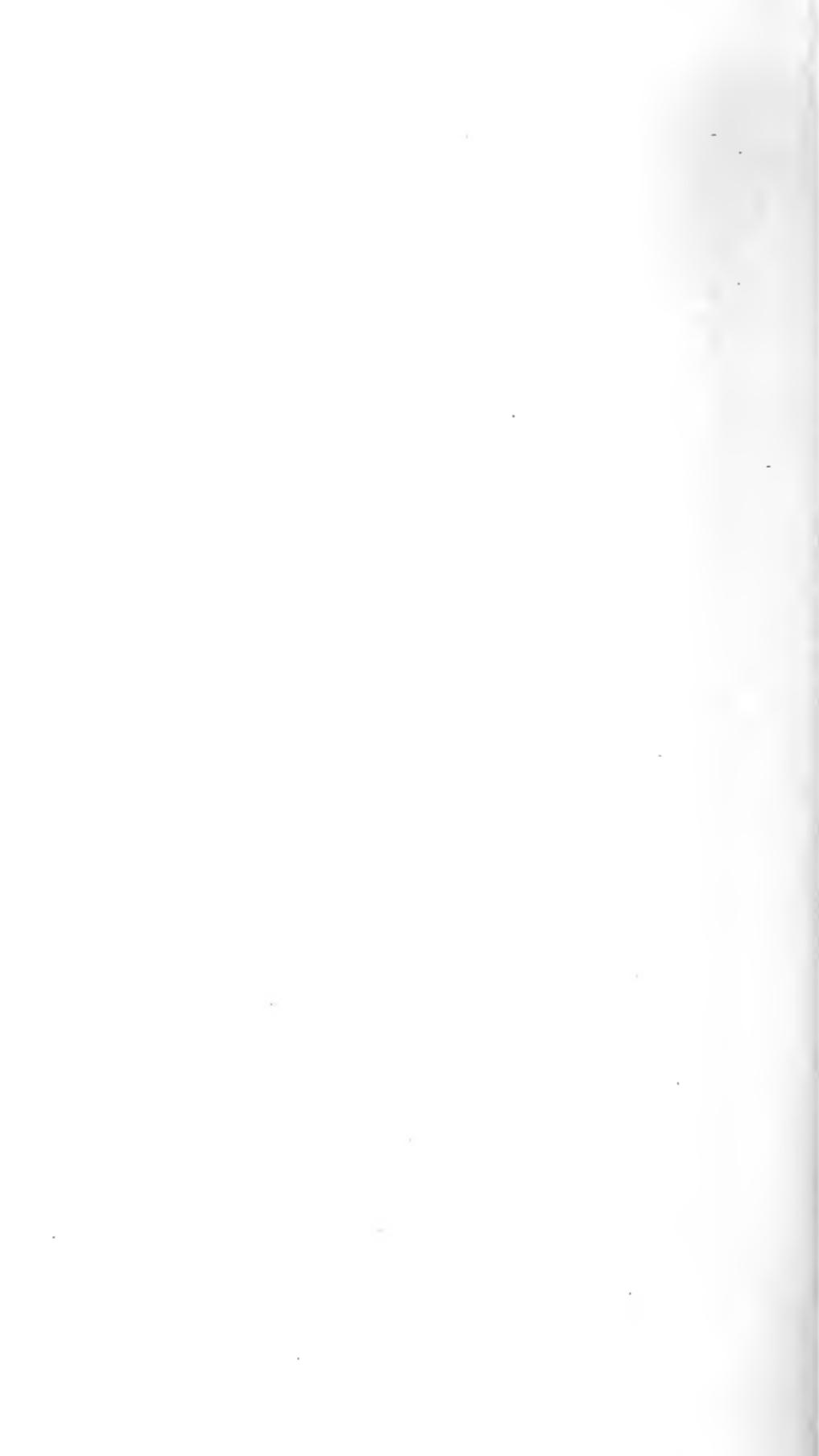
The sight of Windsor's hills and vales bathed in the mystic light of an early summer morning brought no relief to the strain of suspense under which she



John Downman - Pencil sketch

From a pencil sketch by John Downman, reproduced by kind permission of the Editor of
The Connoisseur.

MRS. ROBINSON.



laboured. On the contrary, as she drew nearer she was sensible of her humiliation being sharpened, as if her request for an audience with the Prince had already been refused, and she stood in the streets alone, like a child suddenly expelled from school without a word of explanation or an opportunity of defence, while the rest of her fellows were pursuing their tasks and recreations in undisturbed and heedless continuity. The sombre grey pile of the castle frowned at her with no hospitable mien like that which it was so easy to associate with the Dutch House. Here was no cosy summer residence of a prosperous merchant converted to the use and enjoyment of a Prince, but the abode of majesty itself, portentous, colossal, official, a place that from its exterior seemed to ridicule the notion that the voice of human emotions could ever rise above a whisper within those massive walls.

Rage and despair alternately took possession of her as she waited vainly through the long morning for an answer to her request for an interview with His Royal Highness. Towards four o'clock in the afternoon a messenger from the Castle brought a note to the inn where she waited. The Prince was unable to see any one, being deeply engaged in official business. The message was conveyed through the handwriting of a secretary.

Clearly she could look for no quarter. It was late evening when she reached home to spend a sleepless night. She wished now that she had given her lover just cause for suspicion of her fidelity, and as the wish took shape in her brain her unconquerable love for him blotted it out in a mist of tears. He had

been coerced, misled, shamefully beguiled into this conduct. If only she could see him, speak with him. She took his letters from a cabinet, and the pain of her situation redoubled itself as the trifling incidents of these two years stared at her in his handwriting. In vain she sought to read in these artless effusions the duplicity of the accomplished libertine.

In the morning she drove to Lord Malden's house in Clarges Street. His manner was affable; he received her communications with an air of concern all the more sincere in its appearance for the note of involuntary solicitude in his voice.

“To fight with an unseen enemy is a thankless task,” said she.

He nodded his head.

“His Royal Highness has been much occupied of late. The business of his new establishment has made him difficult of access. But you may count upon my most earnest endeavours to dissipate this temporary misunderstanding as soon as I have the Prince's ear.”

She thanked him and withdrew. But a week passed and still she could gather no hope of satisfaction. To complicate matters, the daily prints had fastened upon the circumstances of the separation, which, with all the weapons of airy ridicule, was ascribed to the lady's inability to resist importunity in another quarter. “If your heart is impervious to my private sorrows,” wrote Mary once again to the Prince, “you will show some regard for my public honour by dissociating yourself with all responsibility for these outrageous insinuations. I conjure you in this at least to render me justice.”

This time the Prince replies. The tone of his letter is lofty and chivalrous. Can she suppose for a moment that he sanctions such accusations? He is assured they are as unfounded as unscrupulous. The mere knowledge that the morning sheets are sullied with such vile calumnies makes him loath to touch them, and he orders a *précis* of the news to be made, that he may avoid contact with such contamination.

She snatches at this crumb of reparation, too hungry to cavil at its substitution for the whole loaf. When he sees through the machinations of her enemies, he will fly once more from the conspiracy of court interests to the calm shores of that Bohemia in which he had chanced on the rock of her unselfish devotion. With a lighter heart she turns to the day's satires on the separation. One talks of her as destined to follow Cleopatra's fate, and seek relief from her sorrows in "poisoned bowl or poniard's steel, or asp." Another pities the shepherdess ordered to "queen it no inch further, but milk her ewes and weep," and quotes at the "deserted fair" her own lines as Perdita :

How often have I told you 'twould be thus !
How often said, my dignity would last
But till 'twere known !

One by one she tosses aside the sheets. "When I see him," she reflects, "this whole artillery of slander shall bind him closer to me than before."

Again she visits Malden, acquaints him with the contents of the Prince's letter. He expresses unbounded satisfaction, and hopes before long to effect a meeting at his own house where their differences

may be finally adjusted. In a few days from this, George Prince signifies his pleasure at the prospect of meeting her once more.

When Malden introduces Mary into the room in which His Royal Highness is waiting, she finds him gazing out of window, as if rapt in contemplation. At the sound of the closing door he turns. The radiance of his greeting lifts her anew into the high certainty of his unchanged affection. What need has he to declare that he never ceased to love her, but that she has enemies who are exerting every effort to undermine her? She scarcely hears the words in her joy at being once more in his presence. Is it the languor of melancholy or of fatigue that tinges his address? His face looks white and worn. But she will know how to nurse the colour back into those cheeks and breathe new gaiety into those drooping spirits. As if to seal the new pact of their happiness, they part without a word of farewell.

Swiftly she walks from Clarges Street to her own house. Summer is dead in the Park, but it lives in the light in her eyes, in her elastic step, in the royal carriage of her head, in the air of pride triumphant which distinguishes this lady as she goes. Hers is the summer of beauty rising invincible through a mist of sorrow and fear.

Next morning Perdita is riding in Hyde Park. The "Vestris" light blue ribbons in her hat flutter with the breeze. Suddenly she discovers the figure of her lover sauntering beneath the tired foliage of late August. At a touch of the spur her horse bounds in his direction. The thunder of hoofs causes Prince Florizel to raise his head, but as his eyes meet hers

he drops it slowly again without a sign of recognition, and turns with the deliberate ease of settled resolution to pursue his walk down a side path in the bend of which he is screened from her further observation.

XXX

THE King was infinitely relieved when Colonel Hotham was able to inform him that the Prince had definitely broken off his connexion with Mrs. Robinson. He was only too glad not to know the circumstances of the rupture, nor did he waste any time in speculating how it had come about. It was enough for him that the end had come opportunely with the extension of the Prince's establishment. But it was not long before the matter had to be opened afresh to His Majesty. Hotham became aware through Lord Malden that the Prince was still persecuted with letters from the lady, who was deeply in debt and appealed to her lover to come to her rescue. The Prince chafed under his inability to make a suitable reply. He had no money. He was sorry, very sorry, but what could he do? Daily the situation was growing more embarrassing, for even the sorrow of an Heir Apparent was powerless to satisfy the demands of creditors. Still there would have been no need to bring the matter again before the King but for the contents of Mary's last letter to George Prince, in which a critical issue was presented. "Can you not stop this cataract of calumny which pours down on both our heads in the daily prints?" she wrote. "Never will I believe that in acting thus cruelly towards me you are obeying the dictates of your own generous nature. But rather than suffer

this mountain of falsehood to grow any larger unchecked, I will unfold the story of our love in public. You will believe that it is very hard for me to unlock the golden chamber of my heart and expose the fine metal of our love to the broad glare of public scandal. But have I not your letters, as you have mine, to give the lie to the base interpretations which go unchallenged ?”

That the Prince’s letters must be secured at once before they could provide laughter to the sovereigns of Europe, was obvious ; that the lady would part with them at a price, was a conclusion odious but acceptable to the King goaded by the spur of such necessity. Nor did any scruples as to the honour of such a transaction retard the activity of his advisers in this matter. When once the King had sufficiently overcome his humiliation to treat the situation in a practical light, his sense of economy bravely asserted itself. It was bad enough to have to pay money for the suppression of a scandal, but it would be wasteful to pay more than was absolutely necessary. He impressed Hotham with the need for exercising the greatest circumspection in this particular, for a commercial instinct often ran high in women of indifferent character, and it would be well to be on his guard at the very outset of the negotiations against the impudence of an extravagant claim.

Hotham saw his way to the conclusion of the business through an offer to pay such debts as had been made at the Prince’s instigation. Mrs. Robinson was in no position to refuse such an offer, inasmuch as the suddenness of her catastrophe had brought an army of impatient and exorbitant creditors to

her very door. Hotham accordingly instructed Lord Malden to ascertain the extent of the debts, to hint at the possibility of their settlement, but to impress upon the lady the condition of the immediate return of all the Prince's letters for payment of the money.

The earlier part of Malden's mission was accomplished easily enough. He was agreeably surprised to find that seven thousand pounds would cover the debts. The King flew into a rage at the mention of this sum ; he had yet to learn that his son could spend more than this amount on his clothes in a single year. His Majesty would not pay a penny more than five thousand pounds. Even this he considered an enormous sum which nothing but the urgency of the case could have wrung from him. Having ascertained the King's decision on this matter, Malden now proceeded to execute the more delicate part of his task by acquainting Mary with the condition attached to this offer. As soon as he had spoken she looked at him in amazement.

“ Is it proposed to buy these letters from me ? ” said she, as if in search of corroboration of what appeared scarcely credible.

The diplomat spoke in his reply.

“ 'Tis with the greatest difficulty, madam, that His Majesty has been persuaded to take this matter at all into his consideration. But there is no proposal to buy these letters. The King has been brought to consider that it would be unjust to cause you inconvenience through the extravagance of his son, but His Majesty insists upon a similar obligation in you to save his son from the consequences of what he cannot help regarding as a youthful indiscretion, by the return of these letters.”

"I will not part with them," said Mary firmly.

Lord Malden looked calmly at her.

"Then I must lament the circumstances which have placed me under the necessity of making this proposal to you." He turned and withdrew.

Mrs. Darby found her daughter in tears. Never before had Mary shown herself so disconsolate. "They might have spared me this last indignity," she cries. Was the bitterness of futile self-reproach all that was left to her as a reward for the completeness of her surrender to one who was powerless now to save her even from insult? Ever since she could remember the fascination exercised upon men by her beauty, they had striven to make her take an ignoble view of her own character. In the face of almost overwhelming odds she had fought the battle of constancy, taking a more and more gallant pleasure in ridiculing the cynic's philosophy of life as her knowledge of its depths and shallows increased with the practice of the stage. For her, the very lapse from conventional morality to which her love for the Prince had persuaded her, carried with it something of a moral impulse. It was the humiliation of this higher sense in the proposal made to her that affected her so profoundly. They were thrusting upon her naked shoulders the odious garb of a corrupt, a venal mendicancy. She shuddered at the touch of that vile robe.

Mrs. Darby, while pitying her, condemned her scruples. Had she reckoned the price of indulging such sensibilities? Were innocent people to be defrauded of their money to save her from the humiliation of parting with these letters? Had she not forfeited by her conduct the claim to a consideration

so ruinous to others? Lightly enough she had borne the burden of her folly until the full measure of its weight had been brought home to her. Was she entitled now to cast it from her, regardless of the injury to those on whom it fell?

To these questions Mary can find no answer. A whole afternoon she sits brooding over these letters. She must give them up, not at the request of the lover, but because his father wished to blot out all traces of her existence in her lover's life. Again and again in the interest of the King she had saved the Prince from committing some act of unfilial rebellion. Was this to count for nothing? One by one she turns the sheets of these singular records in which all the folly of eighteen grins and capers in the gilded frame of a Prince's equipment. Why should she not copy the most cherished among these effusions?

Soon her pen runs busily in the execution of the simple task. Her choice of examples is puzzling, but a world of unwritten memories rises before her in the barest, the most trivial expressions, and before rhapsodical flights of poetry she chooses the lame prose of a message to meet her at dinner or some witless chatter about the Prince's health. Suddenly she starts as if surprised at happening upon something which she had forgotten. Steadily, but for this passing interruption, she pursues her task to its end. When next Mrs. Darby sees her daughter, she reads resignation in her face. Lord Malden is sent for. Mary does not see him, but her mother presents him with the letters. Their interview is formal and involves little speaking. On being assured that these are all the letters, he takes his departure and drives at once

to Colonel Hotham, who posts to Windsor with the precious parcel the same night. The King has gone to bed, but at nine o'clock next morning he gains access to His Majesty, who summons a page immediately on Hotham's withdrawal and orders a fire to be lighted. The boy looks surprised at so unusual a command at such a season, for it is only the twenty-eighth of August.

As soon as the King is alone, he takes the parcel and places it in the fire. For a moment or two it resists the creeping flames, then bursts into flame and burns steadily for some minutes. George the Third watches it from his writing-table, and when the last flicker has died out, takes up his pen to write instructions to Lord North to pay Hotham the five thousand pounds. A gathering sorrow rises in his heart as he writes the circumstances of this transaction to his minister, and when the heaviness of that task is over, he sinks back in his chair with the fatigue of one on whom sudden calamity has heaped an age more crushing than the mere advance of years. But he does not rest for long.

Glancing at the clock he adds "9.40 a.m." to the superscription of his letter, which he folds and seals, and then rings a bell for a messenger. The rest of the morning passes in official business. The mails from Holland and Flanders have come in the day before. The stage reached in the mediation of the Empress of Russia between Great Britain and the United Provinces needs close study. At one o'clock Colonel Hotham sends in a request for an immediate audience.

"How now?" says the King, with majestic im-

patience when the Colonel makes his reappearance. The man is flurried and nervous, and scarcely knows how to frame in words the communication he is bound to make. Lord Malden has ascertained from the Prince the existence of the bond, and is eager to know if it was included in the surrendered batch of his letters.

“Bond! What bond?” says the King, taking fright at the word.

“His Royal Highness gave a bond for the payment of twenty thousand pounds on his coming of age,” says Hotham. “It can have no legal value, for it was made during minority, but its existence in the hands of this lady might be a source of trouble.”

“I do not know what was in the parcel you brought me,” says His Majesty in a failing voice. “I put it in the fire.”

He thought in silence for a few moments, and then rose with a gesture of despair and a look on his face which showed that he thought it improbable that the bond had been surrendered. Hotham asked leave to withdraw, and as the King waved him impatiently from his presence he heard his master babbling in German in a voice from which all the majesty had gone. It was like the voice of a child whimpering at a punishment inflicted for another’s fault.

XXXI

ABOUT this time Mr. Fox lodged in St. James's Street, and as soon as he rose, which was very late (for he spent the night in gaming with his disciples at Brookes's) he held a levee at which, often in the careless deshabille of his nightgown, he expounded his political principles to his followers. George Prince conceived a great affection for the rising statesman, whom he addressed as "My dear Charles," and he attended these levees with all the more delight for the knowledge that his father loathed Fox, and that many a bright jest at the King's expense was made on these occasions.

Seven years before, His Majesty had written of Fox as a young man destitute of common honour and honesty, and Lord North had dismissed him from office. Now, Lord North was approaching the close of his long and disastrous ministry, and the Whigs were gathering in force round the person of the Prince. It was not, however, until March 1782 that Fox became Foreign Secretary with Lord Shelburne under the Marquis of Rockingham. The two secretaries fell out grievously, for Shelburne wished to evade the express recognition of American independence in an acknowledgment of the joint treaty between America and France, while Fox made a desperate attempt to force upon the Government a direct and unconditional

recognition. On the first of July Rockingham died, and a day later Fox resigned.

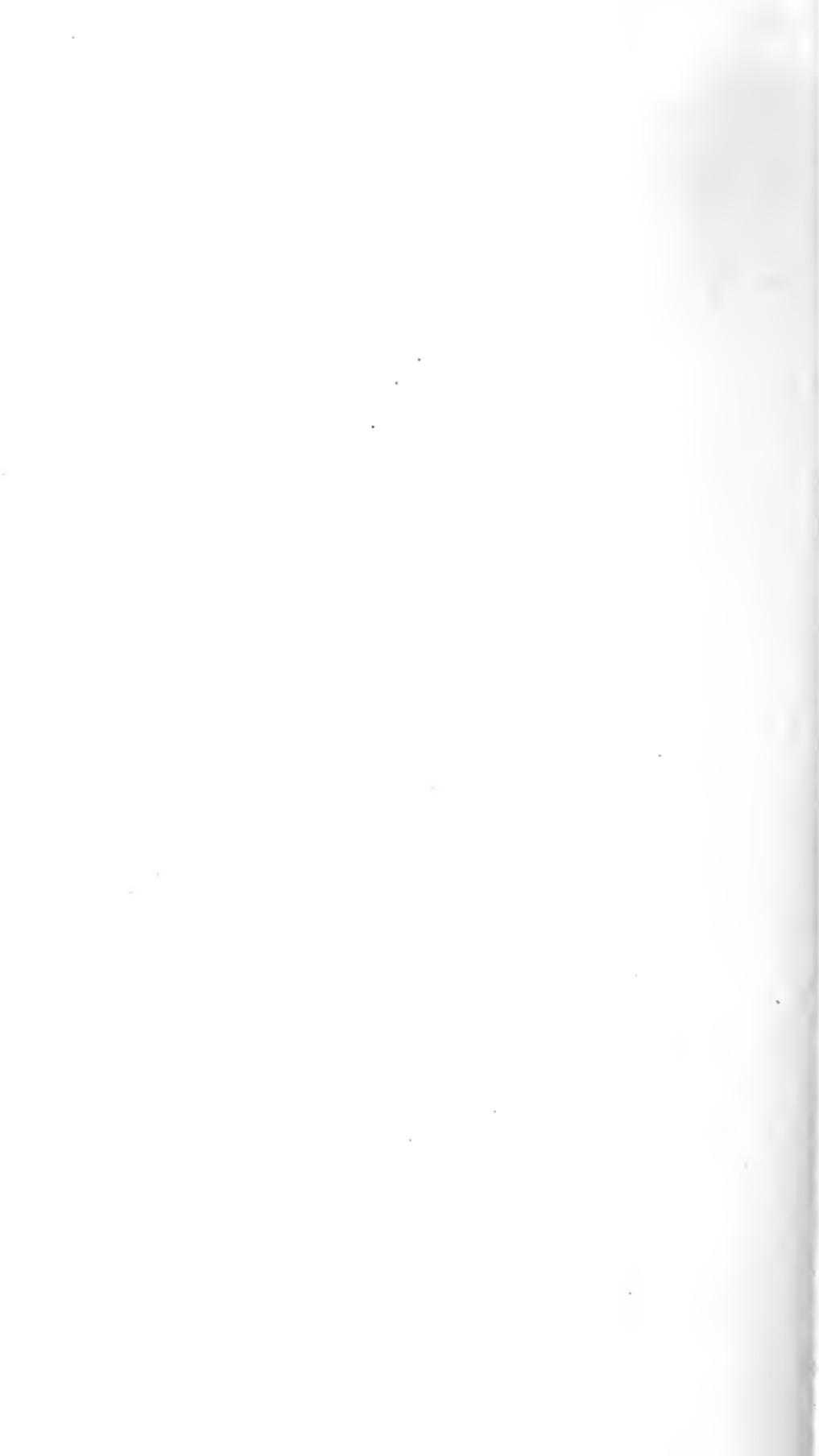
It was not long before his frequent visits to Mary, who now lived in Berkeley Square in a house commanding a view of Lord Shelburne's mansion, became the talk of the town. His absence from Brookes's added emphasis to the circumstance, which (so far from concealing) he seemed eager to publish abroad by driving about with the lady in her carriage. Walpole, with an audacity in such matters which rarely led him on the wrong scent, jumped swiftly to the cynical conclusion. "*Pour se désennuyer*," he wrote, "he lives with Mrs. Robinson, goes to Sadler's Wells with her and is all day figuring away with her." Selwyn made a joke about the appropriateness of the connexion between the *Man of the People* with the *Woman of the People*. But when a friend boldly asked Fox for the reason which kept him so completely from the company of his associates, he was met with the reply, "I have pledged myself to the public to have a strict eye on Lord Shelburne's motives ; that is my sole motive for residing in Berkeley Square." This was to confess more than could have been expected. If he *lived* in Berkeley Square, what room was there for any alternative interpretation of his frequent visits in the same neighbourhood ?

He had not forgotten the evenings in the Green Room of Drury Lane Theatre, and when Mary's plight became known to him, all the chivalry in his nature rose in her defence. She had abandoned the stage and had been warned against the perils of reappearance while the waves of a public scandal were still beating high about her name. She had a child to support.



From a photograph of the picture by Johann Zoffany, R.A.

CHARLES JAMES FOX.



The bond still remained in her possession, and it was the Prince's earnest wish that his promise should be honoured in the substance. He recoiled at the thought of appearing unhandsome in the matter. Yet he was powerless to act himself. Could not his dear Charles help him? Charles welcomed the suggestion hilariously. He did not doubt for a moment the propriety of seeing a lady through a desperate situation, whoever she might be. This lady moreover provided an excellent opportunity for consolidating his alliance with the Prince. If all was fair in love and war, why not also in politics? That Perdita should add the force of her beauty to the Opposition, touched his sense of humour. Everything which could help to disconcert the King's passion for economy was a source of satisfaction to the man who, in extravagance, was almost a match for the Prince himself.

To be as chivalrous as he was gallant, was a deep instinct in Fox's nature; and while he would have been the first to contend that chivalry and gallantry might go hand-in-hand, he would have been the last to assert that they must be inseparable companions. As he was well aware, he could no more fall in love with Perdita than with the Decalogue. Such ethereal beauty as hers almost frightened him. But he smiled as he reflected that in taking up her case few people would credit him with disinterested motives. Those few could be trusted to see through the paradox of his behaviour, and he rejoiced at the prospect of magnifying the error of popular cynicism (with the lady's consent), by associating his name with hers in public as closely as possible.

Mary entered with spirit into this novel kind of

alliance. She regarded Mr. Fox, who was her senior by nine years, in the light of a favourite uncle privileged from her childhood to tease and jest with her. Out of his company she was often dejected ; the negotiations for establishing her claims to assistance through the bond were long and tortuous, and her pride was still in arms against the indignity of figuring as a pauper begging alms. But Mr. Fox knew how to steer her course through the turbid waters of unavailing regret. In public, he revelled in his rôle as the second Florizel to this Perdita ; in private, Diana herself could not have commanded more reverence from him than Mary. At her request alone he suffered Lord Malden to continue his visits, nor did he seek explanations from her concerning the assiduities of another visitor, the cherished soldier of Clinton and Cornwallis, who had returned a year before, after distinguished service in America, only to meet with a cold reception from his Sovereign, who detested the Whig in him. "Well," said His Majesty in a private conference with this Colonel Tarleton, "you have been in a great many actions, had a great many escapes." The insult was not lost on one whose motto, *swift, vigilant, and bold*, did not belie his character.

In the presence of Lord Malden and Colonel Tarleton, Mary received the visit of a city gentleman, who without any introduction had written to her, offering twenty guineas for ten minutes' conversation. The unblushing petition was only one among many with which she continued to be besieged. With the consent of her friends it was agreed to make an example of this gentleman, who was accordingly encouraged by a suitable reply to pay a visit at an appointed hour.

Tarleton's piercing black eyes twinkled merrily when the visitor was announced, and at once betrayed in the sudden solemnity of his face the disappointment he felt in finding the lady in the company of others. But Mary gravely detached her watch from her side, laid it on the table, and abruptly breaking off her conversation with her friends, addressed the stranger in her liveliest vein until the expiration of the ten minutes. She then rose from her chair, rang the bell, and on the servant entering, desired him to open the door for her visitor, who retired in confusion, leaving twenty guineas in the hall. A few days later he received receipts for five guineas from four charitable institutions.

If Fox's efforts to secure for the Prince what seemed to him a suitable allowance on his twenty-first birthday were unsuccessful, he enjoyed at least the satisfaction of being appointed to arbitrate in the matter of Mrs. Robinson's claims. As a consideration for her resignation of a lucrative profession at the particular request of His Royal Highness, she was granted an annuity of five hundred pounds a year, half of which was to descend to her daughter on her decease. The King neither forgot nor forgave what he regarded as Fox's evil influence over his son, and George Prince began an era of extravagance and folly at Carlton House which in the magnitude of its excesses almost blotted all memory of his earlier indiscretion from the pages of history.

To escape from the tiresome notoriety into which she had again been drawn by the settlement of her claim and the gallant patronage of Mr. Fox, Mary now spends a couple of months in Paris. But the audacious addresses of the Duke of Orleans soon draw

upon her the attention of the French court. The Duke is an Anglomaniac, and in spite of herself Mary becomes the rage in the French capital. The presence of *la belle Anglaise* at an opera or play is a social event, and her box is El Dorado for the young men of fashion. The Duke presses his suit with no less confidence than ardour. But Mary is inexorable, and his friend Armand de Gontaut smiles at the conspicuous failure of a devotion so rarely lavished without its full reward. "She is a rose between two thorns," he exclaims as he watches her in the garden of Mousseau on the night of her birthday, when the Duke of Orleans has organised a fête in her honour and the naked trees have been hung with artificial flowers. For throughout the evening she walks with the venerable Sir John Lambert on one side and a dull German lady on the other, nor does she even notice that the coloured lamps in every tree have been cunningly disposed to display the initial letters of *la belle Anglaise*.

Never had Mousseau looked fairer in its jewelled arbours and embowered statues than on that evening. Prodigal fancy could indeed devise no more enchanting scene. Men and women whispered and laughed in those dim pavilions with which the gardens were dotted. The beauty and the chivalry of France revelled there in mask and music; and as if to compel Nature herself into the service of an aristocrat's recreation, a number of mechanical nightingales warbled their mimic melodies into the night air.

Compared with a spectacle like this, the pleasure-gardens of London on a gala night were vulgar, a mere galaxy of gas lamps. But Mary's thoughts were out of France. She had received melancholy news from

Banastre Tarleton ; his affairs were deeply involved. Those American campaigns had fostered in him a dangerous indifference to the orderly control of money. He was reckless rather than extravagant, and in him the instinct to give, rose easily superior to the lust to possess. Although he had been but a year in the metropolis, people had borrowed large sums of money from him, as honest in their intentions of repaying him in full as they were incapable of fulfilling them. "I have only myself to blame in this," he wrote, "but unless I can soon find means to satisfy my creditors, I, who never yet fled from the enemy's cannon, shall be obliged to take refuge from my native land abroad. Your presence in France tempts me thither."

The circumstances of his distress recalled to Mary her own in the early days of her marriage ; and all the glitter of Mousseau in its brightest robes was unable to dispel the sadness of her reflections. Yet it was a sadness sweetened by the knowledge of her capacity to help him. In her reply she declared her intention of returning home shortly and urged him to wait her arrival. Her daughter, who was now eight years old, was delighted at the prospect of being so soon again in England. She disliked the French society in which her mother moved, and showed an outspoken mistrust of the Duke of Orleans which amused if it sometimes disconcerted Mary.

Soon after the fête at Mousseau the Queen of France sent the Duke with a message to the fair English lady, inviting her presence at a public dinner. Mary had all but completed her arrangements for departure, but to refuse would have appeared ungracious. As she was being dressed for the occasion she remembered

the night at Vauxhall when Mr. Fitzgerald had entertained the company by his anecdotes of the French court, and they had drunk a toast to the loveliest sovereign in Europe. For a moment she wondered what had become of this fiery charmer, and then turned to submit herself to the offices of a maid who stood ready with a pot of rouge to stain the natural radiance of her lady's cheeks in conformity with the ruling French fashion. Mademoiselle Bertin (the eminent milliner) looked critically at her own handiwork as Mary stood before her mirror in a train and body of green lustering with a tiffany petticoat festooned with bunches of pale lilac embroidery. The dress had been chosen and executed in a hurry. Mademoiselle Bertin spoke of it as a shot in the dark, for this artist was accustomed to study her clients minutely for many days before hazarding a line that might curve too sharply or a scheme of colour that might predominate to the verge of indiscretion. But Fate and the lady were on her side in this instance. "*C'est un poème inspiré par la beauté de Madame,*" she said in a dry impersonal voice, as if she were speaking of another's work.

The Queen appeared to endorse Mademoiselle Bertin's opinion, for her gaze was fixed again and again on Mary at the *Grand Couvert*. A slender crimson cord alone separated the royal table from the crowd of staring spectators. Marie Antoinette was but a few years senior to her English guest. She too had been married at the age of fifteen, and more than once she glanced with marked curiosity at the miniature portrait of the Prince of Wales which Mary wore on her bosom. On the following day she com-

missioned the Duke of Orleans to request the loan of the painting for a few hours, and on returning it through the same messenger bade him carry to the owner a purse which she had netted with her own hand.

XXXII

ON her way back to London, Mary's thoughts were busy with the misfortunes of Colonel Tarleton. Compassion for his distress mingled itself with the memory of his spirited courtship. How quickly he had penetrated the secret of her masquerade under the protection of Mr. Fox! Again and again she had sought to divert the fire of his glances by some allusion to "dear Charles" that might cheek that ardour; but he had only laughed at Charles's fat legs, and in the very presence of his friend had continued to sigh and languish with comic frankness under the influence of the lady's beauty. When at last he learned the whole circumstances from which had sprung this occasion for an elaborate practical joke at the expense of the public, his delight in her presence had been redoubled. And yet his sense of comedy had risen with the development of his passion for her, so that the tacit agreement never to speak of Fox except as of her recognised lover had carried them through all the humours of enlivening make-believe into the deeper waters of strong personal regard for each other. In America, as he made no scruple of telling her, he had pursued the ladies with no less vigour than the enemy, and he loved to expatiate in his whimsical way upon the historical association of Mars with Venus. When they talked of the war, he laughed a little at what

he thought her exaggerated admiration of American ideas of liberty—"the human plant of liberty" as she had called it, thereby disclosing an affection for rhetorical ornament. Their conversation had been of this when he attended her to the coach which had taken her to Dover on her way to Paris. She recalled it now as she journeyed back through scenes made so recently familiar.

"My heart is with the champions of independence in those happy provinces," she had said.

"But you are an Englishwoman."

"My father was born in America."

"Then farewell to the lover who fought against that father."

She had corrected him. Captain Darby was loyalist. She had nodded to his question if this was the Captain Darby who had recently distinguished himself in the waters of Gibraltar, where he had fought the Spaniards until the rigging of his small ordnance vessel was almost destroyed.

England had little but fair words to offer as a reward for bravery, she reflected, as she compared Tarleton's reception by the King with her father's reception by the Admiralty. Darby had left England in disgust after a visit that did duty for greeting as well as farewell to his family. He had refused to answer all inquiry as to his intentions. Tarleton's bravery had shone like a star in the black night of those American campaigns, but England would let him die in a debtor's prison rather than relieve his distress.

On her arrival in London she wasted no time before repairing to his lodgings. But she was too late. The Colonel had gone. Where? Nobody

knew. He had been ill these last days, appeared to be much worried, and had frequently come home late in the evening after being away all day. Such were the scraps of information collected with difficulty from the woman who kept the lodging-house. She seemed suspicious of visitors and reluctant, as if in the interests of her late lodger, to satisfy their curiosity. Mary liked her, and let fall an unguarded expression of sorrow at coming too late to be of any service to her friend. At this the woman brightened : nearly all his visitors of late had come to persecute him. His last instructions had been to keep in her charge a note which she was to destroy if the lady for whom it was intended did not appear within two days after his departure. It was scarcely necessary for Mary to declare her name, for the woman was satisfied by the agitation of her visitor that this was indeed the lady to whom the Colonel had addressed his note.

In less than an hour Mary was driving to the port indicated in that hurried message from Banastre. He was to take ship early the next morning. With luck and frequent change of horses she might yet save him from the necessity of this ignominious exile.

Had less depended on their meeting, the battle with time and distance would have braced her spirits. Even on the night when she had hurried to Windsor to fight her way to an audience with the Prince, the drive had lent a kind of desperate solace to her despair. But time was of less moment then than now, and this distance was six times the other. As night fell she still had half the journey before her. No sultry air of late summer fanned her as she went, no winking stars paled in an opalescent sky towards morning.

This was a night of mid-winter, bleak and black, bare of all promise of fine weather for the morrow. She saw the steam rise from the panting horses in the dim light of the carriage lanterns, and an icy wind lashed her eyes and mouth as it rushed through the windows which she was too tired or too indifferent to close. She dreamed of a tempest-tost sea, and of herself standing helpless on shore as she watched the ship that bore away her lover rise fluttering like a wounded bird and sink out of sight behind the waves. Each time it disappeared, the terror seized her lest it should be to rise no more. But the black beak of the mast swam up again into her vision with lugubrious persistence. Sometimes she fancied herself near the vessel, poised, as it were, over the waters, and her ears were filled with the hissing of the surf, the crash of the rollers against the hull, the creaking and groaning of timber. Anxiety, fatigue, and cold had worked such mischief in her, that at the stations where the horses were changed through the night she was conscious of little but shouting voices, moving lights, the sound of heavy boots on paved courtyards.

Towards morning the cold grew intenser, but she was sensible of something alight within her like a tiny furnace, powerful enough to defy the cold of icier regions than this. Her face was stiff as an iron mask, but this creeping warmth took slow possession of her body, lulling her into a false security as the post-chaise clattered in the light of winter sunrise over the cobbled stones of a fishing-village. The salt smell of the air whipped her drowsy senses. It came in sharp gusts of a stiffening wind that blew like a sheet upon her as she passed one gap after another in the narrow winding

street. Suddenly the post-chaise stopped at a tavern on a tiny quay. She heard the sea beating restlessly against the masonry of the harbour in which a few masts were dancing madly like the blades of fencers that dip and circle before they cross.

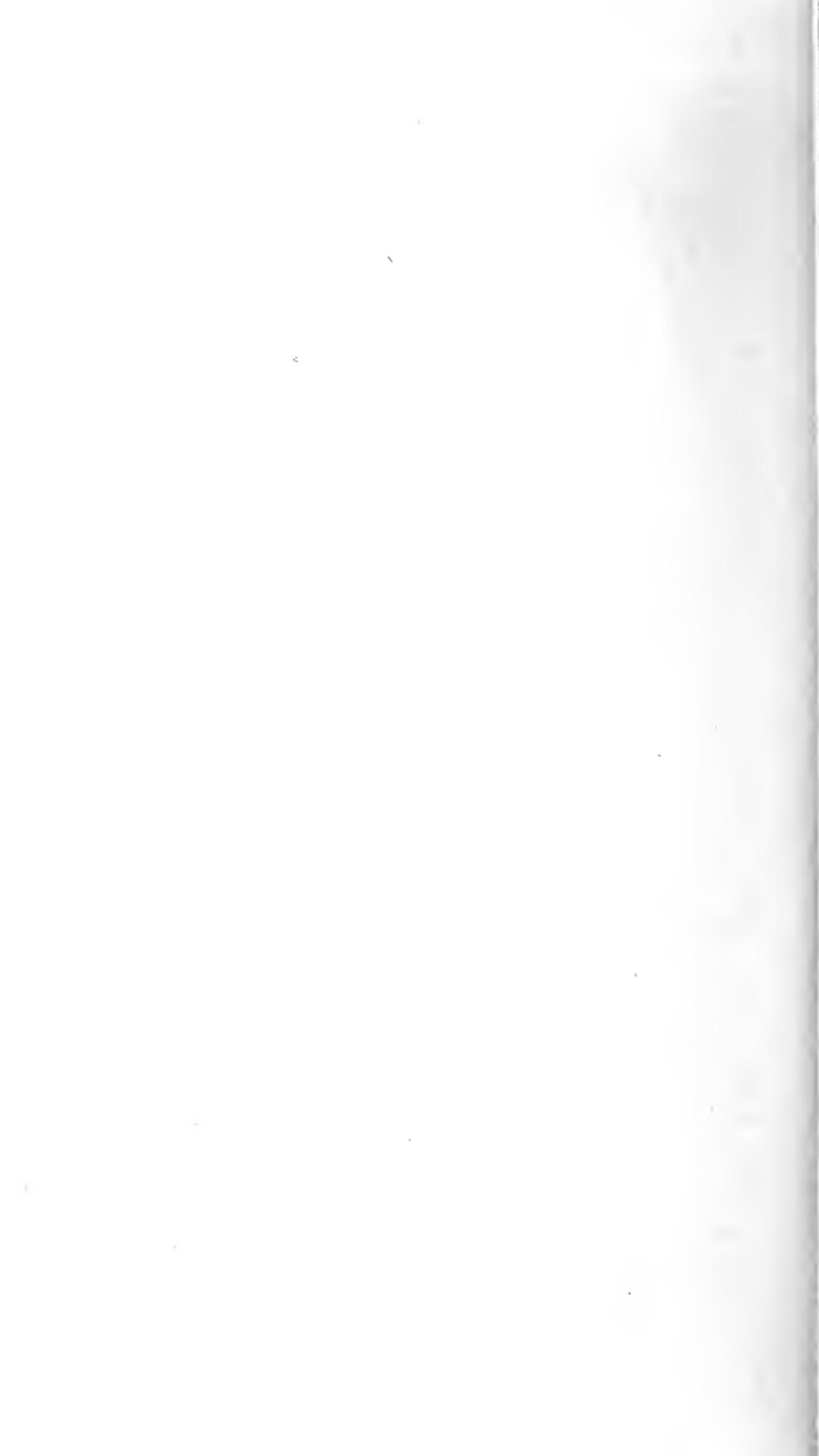
The parlour of the tavern was empty, but from the adjacent room came the noise of sailors cursing and jesting in a strange confusion of laughter and altercation. Breathlessly Mary listened for her lover's voice. What place had he, who had earned so well of King and country, among these blaspheming enemies of law and government?

Occasionally she fumbled nervously for the money sewn in her dress. This was all she had stayed to do before setting out to his rescue. Suppose he had gone already: she would scarcely escape unrobbed from that company. What matter? From the quay came the sound of the hauling of ropes and the rolling of barrels, and above her head some one was tramping heavily about the room, singing a sailor's chanty.

On a table by her side was a model of a battleship under a glass case. What a plaything for Maria! the child was always talking of the sea, and they had often played together at pirates. Would the landlord sell this to her? She walked to a window to look out upon the quay and was surprised that her limbs moved so reluctantly. Outside, the waves were bursting in clouds of spray that fell on the stone flags with the patter of sudden rain and slipped back hissing over the edge of the quay. The signboard of the inn creaked as it swung on its hinges, and at the spreading of a sail in the harbour the wind rattled with the noise of musketry in its onslaught on the canvas.



From a mezzotint by J. R. Smith, after the picture by Sir Joshua Reynolds, P.R.A.
COLONEL TARLETON.



Mary turned from the terror of that prospect to face the trim little parlour with its model ship riding motionless in a puckered sea of blue velvet. Soon she must be discovered. How would she explain her presence? How even ask a question about the man she had come to seek? Under what name had he concealed his identity in such company? Upstairs a door was opened and the descent of heavy footsteps nearing the parlour warned her that her solitude was at an end. A head was thrust through the half-open door, but was withdrawn quickly, and she heard a low whistle, and thought she heard the muttered ejaculation "a woman!"

She ran to the door whispering his name loudly. In the passage he turned and they stood silently facing each other. In a moment his cloak was round her and they ran swiftly from the tavern, up the narrow street, past the low, shuttered houses. But before she had gone many paces her legs stiffened, and she nearly fell. He caught her in his arms and carried her. She felt his arm gripping her shoulder and tried to call to him to loosen that tight grasp, but the words would not come.

When she recovered consciousness, she felt the steady motion of a carriage. Outside, the snow was falling in thick flakes. She thought she was in Labrador, and that the man on the seat opposite her was her father. Why were the windows closed? It was not cold. It was hot. She tried to move, but the shawls clung so closely about her that she gave up the effort to disengage herself. She heard her name. Did she hear it? Or was it only fancy? That voice was not her father's. That hand?

Tarleton looked tenderly at her.

"They will have set sail by now," he said.

"Then I have come in time to save you."

"You have risked your life in my interest. But for you I should have been tossed about on that sea in that company." He shuddered.

The picture of the tavern parlour rose in her mind like a memory of something remote, half obscured by a long lapse of time. Yet it was only a few hours since she had waited there and wondered if her journey had been in vain. To make away at once, as soon as he discovered her presence, was their only chance, for these smugglers were desperate men and would have stuck at nothing to avoid the risk of betrayal which they would infer from his defection. He reckoned accurately enough, however, that they would not waste much time in searching for their new confederate. The perils of the sea for them were light enough in comparison with the prospect of discovery by a spy in the service of the Government.

"You will take this—for my sake," said Mary, unfastening the money from the lining of her dress and giving it to her lover, as the carriage windows showed her the welcome lights of the city. The tears sprang into his eyes as he kissed her, and he shook with fear at the touch of that burning forehead. London was asleep by the time they reached Berkeley Square and he had difficulty in rousing her servants. It was her faithful negro who first answered his repeated raps on the door. Soon the whole household was astir. Gently they lifted her from the carriage and bore her upstairs into that bed from which she did not rise for six long months during which the flame of her life flickered almost to extinction,

XXXIII

MRS. ARMSTEAD satisfied the Whig politicians, but she soon wearied Prince Florizel. Once more an abandoned mistress of royalty took refuge under the protecting wing of Fox, but this time the statesman was caught, and happily caught too in the toils of his own humanity. He not only lived with her, but loved her and ultimately married her. A youth whose cherished dream was to become a poet king naturally preferred the sound of sweet music to the political chatter of place-seekers; and even the masterly speeches of his friend Charles were dull when compared with the sustained sonority of Mrs. Billington's middle notes in a popular ballad of the day. For a brief space George Prince forgot the grossness of the lady's person in the glory of her voice, until reality rent a gaping hole in the veil of his enchantment and he was reduced to the necessity of admitting that he was only happy in her society when he shut his eyes and opened his ears. Soon he was basking in the smiles of her rival, Mrs. Crouch, until the guileless creature was carried out of the royal favour on floods of burgundy and champagne. The pleasures of intoxication were regarded by the Prince as an exclusively male privilege which should be jealously guarded, and even Fox and Sheridan were compelled into astonishment at the audacity with which he practised this privilege.

In a very few years from the time of his establishment this artless impostor was confronted with a very different picture from that of the dainty Prince Florizel he had fancied himself to be indeed. He had looked with tender condescension upon himself as the august patron of Shakespeare who had brought the poet up to date, as it were, in pinning the diamond buckles of his princely invention upon the feet of a living Perdita. But now with all the consequences of his folly about him he stood in the garb of Silenus beneath the blazing chandeliers of Carlton House. Was it surprising that the credit had been utterly ruined of an Heir Apparent whose cook had become his confidant, whose tailor had enjoyed the doubtful distinction of bailing him out of the watch tower after a night of prolonged dissipation? Already he had had to shut up a part of Carlton House and sell his horses by auction, when in the spring of the year 1787 he was forced to ask Parliament for a sum of money to liquidate his debts. It was humiliating for one whose fancy loved to linger idly in the architectural monstrosities of his Chinese Pavilion at Brighthelmstone, to disclose the details of his private expenditure to a curious public consisting of his future subjects.

Fox's father, to help his son out of a similar predicament, had paid a hundred and forty thousand pounds out of his private pocket; and forty pounds a day had not been spent on cake alone, to say nothing of caudle, at Charles's christening.

Towards the end of May, after much wrangling that could not fail to impress the Prince as sordid and unnecessary, Parliament voted a sum of little

more than twenty thousand pounds in excess of what Fox obtained through a father's bounty. It was all the more humiliating because of George Prince's inability to fling the money back into the nation's face in the royal fashion which became him so well.

But not only had Parliament peeped and pried into those minutiae of his expenditure of which he would have scorned to acknowledge even the existence, but also it had asked particulars of the rumour that ran of his marriage with Mrs. Fitzherbert, and had claimed the right to be satisfied as to the actual state of the matter. A most indelicate request, which, George Prince decided, did not merit a truthful reply. A most unchivalrous behaviour to the lady, whose serenity would be less ruffled by appearing as a partner in a splendid intrigue than as the pitiable victim of a marriage made illegal by two Acts of Parliament. That she was married had satisfied her conscience; that he should expose the futility of that marriage by openly confessing it, would hurt her pride. When Fox asked him the truth about the matter, he therefore conceived it to be the gentlemanly, the handsome thing, to betray his friend and lie; and the lie was so well told that Fox repeated it in perfect good faith in the House of Commons and misled the country.

The raising of this question agitated George Prince far more deeply than the mere matter of money. It recalled to him the long and painful courtship of this lady two years before. He was reminded of how in the earlier stages of her apparent insensibility to his distress he had wanted to stab himself; for although the cloak of Florizel was even then fast slipping from

his shoulders, there had been moments in which he still grasped at it and touched the hem of it as it fell. Mrs. Fitzherbert was dangerously near thirty when first they met at Richmond, and already she had been twice a widow when she was married to the Prince at her house in Park Lane.

Yet it was not of his wife that George Prince was thinking as he sat in his box at the Opera a few nights after his embarrassments had been settled by a vote in Parliament. Whatever the nation might do to repair his financial credit, it was powerless, he reflected bitterly, to rehabilitate his credit as a lover ; and this distressed him, for he was haunted by the beauty of Elizabeth Harrington and was at a loss to know how to make overtures to one whose goodness seemed to permeate the very air in which she walked. Marriage would have seemed a small price to pay for her surrender, but even he disliked the notion of bigamy, and if he wooed her as Prince, he knew enough of his own reputation to feel sure that he stood no chance of gaining her consent. Laetitia Lade, the wife of the young baronet who used to appear so frequently at Mary's card parties in Covent Garden, suggested that he should act *incognito* ; and as he now sat listening to the tinkling music of the celebrated Signor Paisiello, he was wondering what name and character to adopt in a novel adventure which engrossed his attentions all the more for the difficulties it presented.

Instead of leaving the Opera House at the fall of the curtain and passing through the private door reserved for his use, he dismissed his suite and entered one of the waiting-rooms in which a moving crowd

of spectators had assembled to gossip until the arrival of their equipages at the main entrance was announced by the liveried attendant at the door. Soon he became the centre of a circle of acquaintances who eagerly grasped this opportunity of making a public bow to the Heir Apparent. It was observed that His Royal Highness was unusually *distract*, for he gave but half his attention to the conversation, and seemed to be always looking through gaps in the circle as if in the hope of discovering somebody in another part of the room. His mind was, in fact, still occupied with the problem of choosing an appropriate character as *incognito*, and he thought to obtain suggestions among the macaronies who moved about with increasing distinctness for the observer, as the solemn voice of the servant summoned more and more people from the House.

His immediate intention was diverted, however, by the strange spectacle of a young woman of fashionable appearance in whom a conspicuous beauty struggled almost to the point of success to overcome the marks of illness and suffering. She was seated on a table; the ease with which she turned her head and the grace with which she acknowledged the recognition of one person after another formed an arresting contrast to a rigidness in the attitude of her body that stamped itself as involuntary. A rare delicacy in the distinction of her costume helped still further to emphasise the singularity of her position. While the Prince's eyes followed her movements with increasing fascination, she was approached by two liveried servants who took from their pockets long white sleeves, which they drew on their arms. They

then lifted her up and bore her across the room. As they passed the Prince he was observed to shudder slightly and make a low inclination of the head. But about the lips of the paralysed lady hovered a smile of unspeakable sweetness, and the tired eyes of Mary Robinson shone with a sudden lustre as she was borne past the bowed head of her lover to the carriage that awaited her at the entrance to the Opera House.

XXXIV

REPEATED strokes of misfortune had broken the spirits no less than the body of Mary since the night of her fatal journey to the rescue of Banastre Tarleton. The fever had left her a cripple, and before long it had become clear to her physicians that in the best case she whose walk had been, in the freedom of its movement, like a challenge to infirmity, would never walk again without the aid of crutches. She had bathed for two successive winters in the waters of Aix-la-Chapelle ; but neither the rose leaves with which her admiring friends caused the surface of the water to be covered, nor the serenades which they sang under her windows, could chase the fury of pain from her limbs ; nor did a course of mud baths at St. Amand, to which she consented before her return to England, prove any more serviceable.

Banastre was devoted in his attentions to her and spared himself no trouble to obtain recreation and amusement for her in the hours in which her mind was not occupied in battling with her afflictions. It was long before he ceased to load himself with reproaches for the follies of his own conduct which had involved her in such disaster. She was compelled to insist upon his silence on a topic which, as she assured him with all the persuasiveness of her affection, could not be broached without adding to

her miseries. For, that she had saved him in the hour of his need, was a source of consolation to her which she strove hard to keep unalloyed.

She was in Germany when the extraordinary history of Mr. Fitzgerald was revealed to her in the reports of his joint trial with a man called Brecknock who had acted as his literary agent in a series of circumstances conspicuous to this day and likely to be conspicuous for all time in the annals of crime.

Mary had known Fitzgerald as the importunate lover with a style in dress and conversation that distinguished him agreeably from the world of macaronies in which he moved. In the field of gallantry she had recognised in him the perfect type of the dangerous man. Whether he stormed or sighed at a lady's feet, it was no practised system of courtship but the natural ebullition of an amorous temperament. His repentance for wounding the feelings of a lady was never the less sincere for the desperate and often unscrupulous ardour with which he pursued her against what she imagined (erroneously in his eyes) to be her own inclinations. In the reports of the trial which now reached her, this irresistible creature, with "a manner beautifully interesting towards women," figured as duellist, homicide, lawbreaker and despiser of all law, human or divine.

His most charitable supporters in his own country supposed him to be mad, and told anecdotes of his wild hunts at night when the inmates of the farmhouses awoke in terror at his unearthly hallooing and the rush of hounds and horse through their silent neighbourhoods. But all protest was useless and even stimulated him to fresh acts of defiance. He had always been whimsical, and with the multiplication of

his whims in the last ten years, the principle that his whim must be law at any cost, had grown into a settled conviction. Thus on visiting some friends he complained that the face of a guest was disagreeable to him at the dinner-table, and insisted, with threats of the most terrible consequences if he were disobeyed, on the man's removal. But his violence rose to a climax in the treatment of his own family. He conceived himself to be wronged in the testamentary disposition of a father who made no secret of a natural preference for a less truculent brother. This was enough for George Robert : he would have justice. Not the justice which could be reluctantly forced from the law, but the justice which an individual whose claim to be obeyed rested on no intelligible sanction whatever could compel by the exercise of unflinching violence. He accordingly imprisoned his brother, and even employed a man to shoot him. The hired assassin missed fire and returned to Fitzgerald with the news that he had failed in his commission, whereupon Fitzgerald shot him like a dog, and buried him in his clothes.

In the same year he captured his father and confined him to Rockfield House. After generously but vainly affording him an opportunity of altering his will in a manner conformable with his son's delicate sense of justice, he had him chained to a large block of wood and severely beaten, with a view to mitigate the sternness of the parental decision. Three of the elder Fitzgerald's teeth were knocked out in the process. From the younger's point of view, this was better than nothing, but it was not all that he wanted.

In order that justice should not be perverted in

the eyes of the country in which he cut such a tremendous figure, he employed Brecknock to represent his case in the newspapers, and Brecknock conducted his patron's defence with a tact and ability all the more surprising when it came to be known that he was the victim of an extraordinary delusion under the influence of which he thought he had discovered the secret of perpetual life. The device was simple as it was insane. On every Good Friday he had himself bled into a bowl and then swallowed his blood as a sort of sacrifice.

But the comparative impunity with which the two associates pursued a course of violence and crime that strains credibility almost to breaking-point as we read of it to-day, met with a check in the murder of Patrick McDonnell in a scuffle in which both were involved, and for the consequences of which both were pronounced guilty and condemned to be hanged. Could this be the gay, talkative Fitzgerald of Vauxhall resplendent in the latest eccentricities of Parisian fashionable attire, this the man of whom Mary now read lying on his face on a prison bed for three hours and a half without uttering a word, his dress a threadbare greatcoat, his shaven head tied in a clean pocket-handkerchief?

Repugnance at the details of his execution mingled with an irresistible curiosity to know them as she sat in the silent shelter of those German woods with all the glory of early June about her. After being carried to her seat she had dismissed her attendant in order to indulge her fondness for the solitary contemplation of nature. But she could not keep her eyes from the sheet that lay spread on her knees before her. A few hours before his execution he had smiled at the friends

who visited him, as if in no way apprehensive of danger. The memory of his smile, so winning, so unpremeditated, returned to her now with sickening precision. Whimsical to the last, he had twice refused to die on a Monday, but it was on a Monday, the 12th of June, 1786, that the end had come for him. She had heard aspersions cast on his bravery. But where was the taint of cowardice in this man who, when the first rope broke with the sudden check as he plunged himself off the ladder, rose unaided to his feet and called the sheriff to procure another and a stouter ?

Above Mary's head, birds twittered and piped in the trees, the sun shone with increasing warmth as the day advanced. In the distance passed to and fro the figure of her little girl, who was chasing butterflies with all the blithe cruelty of her eleven years. The printed sheet dropped from her mother's lap upon the moss at her feet. How strange were the vicissitudes of human life ! How contradictory the blood and violence of the scenes of which she had read and the calm serenity of this noble German forest with the spreading benevolence of its friendly foliage and its atmosphere of peace and goodwill to all men ! The horrid spectacle of a dangling body, a thing that swayed and quivered, pursued its way into the very air of her neighbourhood, infecting the sunlight with its pictured ghastliness. For supernatural horrors she had a weakness, and would have found nothing repulsive, however alarming, in the apparition of Fitzgerald's ghost in an avenue of tapering trees near which she was seated. But this pitiless account of his execution filled her with a choking sense of disgust.

The spot she had chosen for her meditations was removed from the sight of human habitations, and the forest air was alive with the steady humming of innumerable bees. A hare darted across a path within a few yards of where she sat, and disappeared with a faint rustle into an undergrowth of ferns.

“God of Nature!” murmured Mary, “Sovereign of the universe! How sublime are Thy works!”

XXXV

THE year 1786 had not come to a close before she received a fresh shock in the news of her father's death. Disgusted with the ingratitude of his own country for the services he had rendered in the siege of Gibraltar, he had set out at the age of sixty-two to Petersburg. The great Catharine extended a warm welcome to distinguished foreigners and knew well how to turn their European experience to the advantage of Russia, so that Captain Darby, who was armed with powerful recommendations from the Duke of Dorset and the Count de Simolin, soon obtained an appointment in the Imperial Russian service. In two years he was promoted to the command of a seventy-four gun ship with a promise of nomination as admiral on the first vacancy. But on the fifth of December he died. To mark her appreciation of his services Russia buried him with military honours, and he was followed to the grave by Admiral Greig, Count Czernichef, Count de Simolin, and the officers of the fleet.

The poem which Mary composed to his memory showed that his death extinguished every trace of bitterness which at times she felt for the conduct of a good sailor but an indifferent husband and father. Through this highly coloured panegyric of his valour sounds the clear note of a piety which grew steadily

in her declining years and was deepened by the gradual invasion of private sorrows upon the cheerfulness of her spirits.

On her return to England she fixed her residence at Brightelmstone, chiefly for the benefit of her daughter, who began at this early age to show symptoms of a consumptive tendency. About this time tragedy fell thick as the winter snows of Labrador about her; and as she sat at her window and looked across the sea in those hours of meditation lengthened to weariness by the relentless nature of her infirmity she was often unable to check the tears that rose in her eyes at the remembrance of even those pleasurable moments which time and misfortune had tinged with grief. She was not one upon whom the resignation of old age had stolen calmly with the progress of life. She was even now scarce thirty, and already four years had passed since the hope and the glory of youth, with its indomitable belief in the beauty of what is yet to come, what the years still hold enveloped in the beckoning mists of futurity, had been cut off by an affliction that had swooped down on her with the swiftness and the suddenness of a thunderbolt. When they told her that William Brereton, that other Florizel of her stage days, had died insane, she only bowed her head and muttered, “Another, and yet another.”

Yet her mind was too active to be entirely engulfed in a retrospect of sorrows. From her childhood she had belonged by nature to that separate confraternity of men and women for whom life must always represent, not only a thing to be lived, but an object of study and contemplation to be embodied

in some form of art. That she was not the British Sappho that her indiscriminating admirers fondly allowed themselves to think her, made no difference, for it was in the measure of her success and not in her ambitions that the absurdity of such comparison became obvious.

It was in the presence of Mr. Richard Burke that she improvised her "Lines to him who will understand them," and the young man lost no time before using his influence with his father to obtain their insertion in the *Annual Register*. Edmund Burke himself introduced them with a warm panegyric. They were not remarkable as poetry, but their sad sincerity still awakens pity in the hearts of those who are familiar with the source of their inspiration.

The pursuit of literature now became as much a business as a recreation for Mary, and popularity soon added its incentive to further efforts when in the winter of 1790, under the signature of "Laura," she entered into a poetical correspondence with Robert Merry, whose peculiar extravagancies of fancy originated a school of poetry known as the *Della Cruscan*, from the fact that its founder was a member of the *Scuola Della Crusca* in Florence. Walpole wrote with humorous contempt of Merry's "gossamery tears and silky oceans," but for a time editors and publishers looked favourably on anything in the *Della Cruscan* style, and Mary sailed into the esteem of the blue-stockings, and the public who followed their lead, on a wave of glittering epithets.

Banastre Tarleton was still her devoted companion, and her literary gifts had proved of valuable service to him in his "History of the Campaigns of 1780."

and 1781 in the Southern Provinces of America." He was better fitted to wield the sword than the pen, and would have cut a sorry figure, had he been left to prepare his narrative without some such aid as Mary had been able to lend him. While her spirits were enlivened by these literary exercises her health suffered under the nervous strain for which her condition unfitted her. Her limbs were frequently racked with acute pains, and in 1791 while at Bath she was ordered a dose of eighty drops of laudanum to relieve her suffering during a particularly sharp attack. But even under the influence of the narcotic her mind still pursued its literary exercises, and on awaking after a sleep of some hours she dictated a poem about an unfortunate creature known as "mad Jemmy" to her daughter. A few days before, she had seen him pelted with stones and mud, and the pity awakened in her by his condition now found an outlet in the composition (under circumstances that alarmed both her mother and her daughter) of the poem, "The Maniac."

Fresh sorrow assailed her in the summer of the following year, when she realised that the friend in whom her affections had centred for the last ten years was no longer faithful to her. Banastre Tarleton, in whose interest her health had been ruined beyond all possibility of recovery, could hide the truth from her no longer; she had no reproaches for him, but could only point at her own enfeebled body and nod her head sadly in silent comprehension of the bitter fact. Could she expect that upright, vigorous man of action, in whom the blood still flowed merrily, to pass the rest of his life with the loadstone of her affection,

the affection of a woman dying by inches, round his neck ? She had given him everything, but by now ingratitude could have no surprises for her. Tenderly she bade him farewell, and he left her without even guessing the agony of grief this separation cost her. She was urgently in need of a hundred pounds, but hid this from him in order to spare him the pain which she knew he would feel at his inability to help her.

In July she left London with Maria and Mrs. Darby, intending to spend a summer in Spa ; but on landing at Calais she decided not to venture into Flanders, which was still the seat of war. Between the English and the French coasts she had written stanzas embodying her farewell to Tarleton, for whom, as for the Prince, her affection survived all cruelty. She wrote of him as of one guided by no servile passions, but the born rover passing like the bee from flower to flower, to sip new sweetness with unthinking zest.

Calais presented few attractions to Mary, but in her dejected state of mind she preferred its insipid amusements to the discomforts of journeying farther. The rumble of revolution reached even to the edge of the water, and the air was full of theories of the rights of man and the wrongs of impoverished aristocrats. For Mary, the principle of aristocracy was so ingrained in nature itself that she could not conceive of liberty in its highest sense without aristocratic institutions. It was different in America, for there the struggle had been not against monarchy itself but against the unjustifiable tyranny of a monarch from whom it had been necessary at any cost to cut loose for the salvation of the country. She admitted, and had shown in many instances in her private life, a

sympathy with the oppressed, but she lacked all instinct for revenge. Who could have suffered more wrong than she from the privileges of aristocracy? Yet she preserved unimpaired her instinctive aversion from the standards of the majority, which she was no more capable of accepting as final than she would have been capable of surrendering herself in fact to their champion, Mr. Fox.

Apart from the discussion of these problems, in which she took an interest more theoretical than practical, her chief recreation in Calais was to watch the outgoing and incoming of vessels. She would be carried in her chair to a spot on the quay from which she could pursue her observations, and would often sit for hours watching the faces of the people as they passed to and fro. Except during those attacks in which her whole frame was convulsed with pain and she needed the attentions of both her mother and daughter to steady her, she caused little trouble as a patient. She was eager to spare her daughter the constant spectacle of her infirmity and would beg to be left alone while Mrs. Darby and the girl took walks into the country and beguiled their leisure hours in the study of its botanical products.

Her attention was arrested one evening, when she was seated in her accustomed place, by the appearance of a passenger who lingered behind at some distance from the stream of men and women making their way into the town after disembarking from the vessel, to engage seats in the coaches for Paris. From the loitering gait of this solitary figure it was easy to guess that he intended to stay in Calais, but he moved with undecided steps as if uncertain in which direction

to proceed, and at times he peered furtively into the faces of the people whom he passed as if half in the expectation of meeting a friend. The tidiness of his dress was no less noticeable than its poverty, and through the hesitation of his manner appeared the deliberate (Mary thought almost the impudent) indifference of one whose set purpose, whatever it might be, would not easily be turned aside. Her impression was strengthened when the disappearance of a group of people, who had come like herself to watch the passengers land, permitted him to gaze without interruption in her direction.

His small, sharp features were only partially visible, for his coat was buttoned to the chin, and his hat was tilted forward. He stood still now with his hands behind his back, and the fixity of his stare began to disconcert her. Was it the structure of her chair, which so clearly revealed the invalid within it, that awakened such unblushing curiosity? She began to wish that the time had come for her mother to fetch her away, and looked uneasily again and again towards the town, partly hoping to recognise the advancing figure of Mrs. Darby and partly to find the stranger had moved from his position when she suffered herself again to observe him. The strangeness of his attitude was emphasised, however, when next she looked at him, by the shifting light of the sun, which was dipping low on the horizon into a sapphire sea, making of the erect figure nothing more recognisable than a black silhouette against a background of radiant colour.

The sound of his voice startled her as she now saw him advance towards her chair.

“ This cannot and yet this must be she.”

One hand grasped the arm of her chair, the other rose as if in defence to protect her from his coming. He stooped over her.

“ Mary ! ” said he in a broken voice that mingled with hers as she cried “ Tom ! ”

“ Why are you here ? ” she said rapidly. “ What has brought you ? Can you want anything of me ? ”

“ The child,” said he feebly.

She looked wildly at him.

“ You cannot take her from me. She will not go.”

“ I do not want to rob you of her,” he said gently.

“ My brother has returned from the East Indies. He is well disposed toward me and I want to introduce our daughter to him. That is all. You will come, will you not ? ”

Although he stood close to her, at her side, she looked at him now as at some familiar figure dimly discernible across an impassable gulf.

“ I will think of this,” she said slowly, as at the sound of advancing footsteps she turned to greet her mother and her daughter.

“ This is your father, Mary,” she said simply.

The girl smiled. Tom looked on the ground. Mrs. Darby began to move her daughter’s chair. In silence they walked to the hotel.

XXXVI

COMMODORE WILLIAM ROBINSON had accumulated much wealth in the East Indies. The spectacle of his brother's miserable condition distressed and disconcerted him. He mistrusted Tom's account of his misfortunes, but he saw an opportunity for exercising a kind of magisterial charity which satisfied his sense of duty and flattered his vanity. He expressed his willingness to see his niece, while indicating in as delicate a manner as the circumstances would permit, that an introduction to her mother would be less welcome to him.

Mary disliked the idea of beginning an association with any member of Tom's family, but solicitude for the welfare of Maria overbore her own aversion, and after some discussion she consented to accompany Tom with their daughter to London.

They had only just time to leave Calais on the second of September, before the issue of an *arrêt* by which all British subjects were restrained throughout France. This was the day of the prison massacres, and only three weeks later Royalty was officially abolished by the Convention, and the Republic celebrated the first day of the year One. Tom laughed and alluded to their fortunate departure in the nick of time as "The Lucky Escape," reminding Mary of her comic opera with that title which had been attended with

some success in her theatrical days. But Mary had little pleasure in the circumstances to which they owed their deliverance. Had she not written of Maria as the "sweet solace of her mournful state," and was she now to be deprived of her company for the sake of material advantages, the value of which she knew only too well? She could not help indulging the hope that something might yet happen to check the success of these manœuvres.

The Commodore was delighted with his niece. She was gentle, accomplished, undeniably attractive to look on. What was to become of such beauty and such innocence, he reflected, after a single interview with her, without the protection of respectable persons? He pitied the girl for her parentage. Tom would never do anything: his wife had already done too much. The only chance for Maria was to be separated at once from both, nor had he much doubt that the wisdom of such a separation would be apparent to them when it was made a condition of his protection. Mary listened without surprise to this proposal when Tom conveyed it to her, nor did she trouble to ask Tom's opinion. The decision, she said calmly, must rest with Maria herself: she was now seventeen, and of an age to take a responsibility which fell naturally upon no other. When they told her to make a choice, she only laughed and asked if the Commodore was in earnest. Once more the discomfited Tom disappeared, to encounter the indignant reproaches made by his brother at this unceremonious refusal of his bounty.

Side by side the three women lived, united as much by misfortune as by the ties of blood, Mrs. Darby conducting the household, Mary pursuing her literary

occupations, Maria giving her whole heart to the task of waiting upon her mother, both as nurse and secretary. In a procession at once grotesque and melancholy the emotions which Mary had lived, her fortunes and misfortunes, her hopes and her despairs, now took the literary form of sonnets, monodies, lyrical tales, romances which flowed from her pen with a mechanical ease all the greater for the popular success accorded to her efforts.

Of persecuted virtue she wrote, of solitude and woe, of the dangers of credulity, of the delusions of ambition, of Garrick's "clear deep whisper and persuasive sigh," of noble Reynolds, of Marie Antoinette languishing in her prison and envying the liberty of the robin at her window, and of her children—

Scarce born to greatness ere consigned to woe.

From the satirical delineation of the foibles of female gamblers in a farce she passed to the sombre gloom of a Sicilian tragedy.

But while borne along by the necessity of rapid composition (for she needed money) she longed eagerly for a respite from a form of labour which became more and more exhausting as, in their progress, the years increased for her their load of personal sorrows. The death of Mrs. Darby in 1793 revived anew the bitterness of the reflections which she had thought (alas too vainly) could never again disturb her tranquillity. Yet she was glad that her mother died in the undisturbed companionship of the wayward daughter whose life she had followed with so much compassion if with so little comprehension. Five years later, in 1798, Tarleton's marriage to a daughter

of the Duke of Ancaster made her once more aware that time could not subdue her affection for him. In the farewell poem which she had written to him she had spoken of woman's heart growing fonder when her dream of bliss was over. Now the lines of the faded manuscript danced at her through a mist of tears.

At the beginning of this year she had begun to write her memoirs. She who in the days of a splendid prosperity had cared nothing what posterity should think, if it should think at all, of her actions, now felt an irrepressible yearning for justification. Daily the task of writing had absorbed more and more of her vitality until it had become almost a function in her existence, and with a natural impulse she now bent the services of her talents to the written defence of her own memory and the memory of those whose associations with her had involved them in a measure of abuse and calumny. In 1799 she undertook to edit the literary department of *The Morning Post*, and several of her own contributions appeared in this journal under the signature "Tabitha Bramble."

But in the same year she fell dangerously ill. Constant anxiety as to her liabilities had caused her to seclude herself from the large number of friends who had enjoyed meeting in her society. She had dispensed one by one with the comforts and elegancies which alone could invest her difficult conditions with some of that outward grace of which she more and more felt the need as an excuse for wishing to continue her life. Poverty, as she too well knew, ill became her. Pain left its cruel marks upon her body no less than upon her mind.



From a photograph by Mansell & Co. of the picture in the Wallace collection by
Sir Joshua Reynolds, P.R.A.

MARY ROBINSON.

One morning as she lay sleeping lightly after a night of torture which her physicians scarcely dared to hope that she would survive, an attorney and his client, a parson, burst into her chamber, to demand her appearance as a witness in a suit pending against her brother. She was hardly able to make intelligible answers to the questions addressed to her. At last the parson, impatient at the failure of the attorney to extract valuable information from her, threw the subpœna upon her bed, and as he hurriedly left the room she could hear him angrily exclaim, "Who to see this lady could believe that she was once called 'the beautiful Mrs. Robinson'?"

XXXVII

IN the spring of 1800 Mary's doctors forbade her to continue her literary work and recommended as a last expedient that she should make trial of the Bristol waters. She had not money enough for the expenses of the journey. Never indifferent to the needs of others in distress, she had lent a considerable sum to a nobleman to whom she now applied for a return of a part of the money ; but although she stated the melancholy reasons for her application, her letter remained unanswered.

In despair her daughter contrived that she should be removed to Englefield Cottage, near Windsor, and for a time in the peace of her surroundings and the pure air of the country her mother recovered some of her spirits. In spite of the doctors' orders she occupied ten successive days in August in dictating to her daughter a translation of Dr. Hager's "Picture of Palermo." Reluctantly she agreed to forego a cherished project of giving Klopstock's "Messiah" to English readers in blank verse. With a calm obstinacy which surprised those around her she fought against the conviction that she was dying, but as the autumn wore into winter she found herself unable to bear the fatigue of being borne from one chamber into another. Even then she encouraged in others the hope that no longer lived in herself by requesting

her daughter frequently to read to her, and from the liveliness of her comments it was difficult for the girl to believe that her mother's life was so near its end.

But in Maria's absence she at last gave to a friend particular instructions that left no doubt of her knowledge that she would never rise again from a bed strewn with pillows to support her in those paroxysms of pain to which she was subjected more and more frequently. She begged to be buried in Old Windsor Churchyard as simply as possible, and named a few friends to whom she wished to bequeath the few personal trifles which represented all the property she possessed. Gallantly she summoned to her aid all the spirits left in her when, on the 28th of November, her friends celebrated her forty-second birthday by numerous kindly messages and gifts of flowers. But the composure which she strove to maintain in Maria's presence broke down towards the beginning of December, when she shook her head at the nurse, who sought to persuade her she would get well, and said, "I am but a very little time longer for this world."

For a fortnight she struggled against the suffocation threatened by an accumulation of water upon her chest. Again and again she believed that her last moment had come. They told her Christmas Day was within a few hours. She said she would never see that day. Between night and morning her distress was so great that she cried, "O just and merciful God, help me to support this agony." Yet she lived through the whole of Christmas day, sinking towards evening into a lethargic stupor.

“ My darling Mary,” she said, as her daughter leaned over the pillows. In another hour she lost consciousness and soon after noon on the twenty-sixth of December she died.

Her picture hangs in a place of honour in the long room at Hertford House, a daily source of wonder, admiration, curiosity, to the spectator: wonder at a beauty that sorrow and misfortune could not vanquish (for the sadness of more than half her life was in those eyes when Gainsborough painted them); admiration of the painter’s power to fix for ever the character and the incarnate existence of a personality buried, but for this romantic interpretation, deep in the débris of what is called history; curiosity in the irony of fact which confronts him in the mysterious life of the picture, upon which the colour rests as from the brush of yesterday, and the death more than a hundred years ago of the lady pourtrayed.

For Florizel, Mary Robinson was no more than the Perdita of a passing folly. When he died, his thoughts were of another, and another’s portrait was hanging on his neck. For Mary, Prince Florizel remained to the last one of whom she could not think evil. In this lies no reason, but much humanity. As she lay dying she requested that a lock of her hair might be sent to the Prince.

NOTES



To the Reader.

More than half a century ago Thackeray wrote, "I take up a volume of Dr. Smollett or a volume of The Spectator, and say the fiction carries a greater amount of truth in solution than the volume which purports to be all true."

While all the persons named in *Perdita, A Romance in Biography*, existed in fact, and while the greater number of scenes, conversations, and incidents in this book rest on historical facts, it has been found expedient to present the whole mainly in the form of fiction, in order to preserve a larger truth than could be conveyed in a purely historical narrative. To what extent the author has employed the resources of fiction to complete the significance of his material, may be gathered by reference to the following books.

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impersonated by Mary Robinson
at Drury Lane Theatre*

1776	December 10	<i>Juliet</i>	in <i>Romeo and Juliet</i> début;
1777	February 17	<i>Statira</i>	in <i>Alexander the Great</i> (Nathaniel Lee)
"	" 24	<i>Amanda</i>	in <i>A Trip to Scarborough</i> (Sheridan's adaptation from Sir John Vanbrugh's <i>The Relapse</i>)
"	April 10	<i>Fanny Stirling</i>	in <i>A Clandestine Marriage</i> (George Colman and David Garrick); benefit
"	September 30	<i>Ophelia</i>	in <i>Hamlet</i>
"	October 7	<i>Lady Anne</i>	in <i>King Richard III.</i>
"	December 22	<i>Lady</i>	in <i>Comus</i> (Milton)
1778	January 10	<i>Emily</i>	in <i>The Runaway</i> (Hannah Cowley)
"	April 9	<i>Araminta</i>	in <i>The Confederacy</i> (Sir John Vanbrugh)
"	" 23	<i>Octavia</i>	in <i>All for Love</i> (Dryden)
"	" 30	<i>Lady Macbeth</i>	in <i>Macbeth</i> ; benefit
"	November 11	<i>Palmira</i>	in <i>Mahomet</i> (Miller and John Hoadly)
1779	February 3	<i>Miss Richly</i>	in <i>The Discovery</i> (Mrs. Sheridan)
"	" 8	<i>Alinda</i>	in <i>The Law of Lombardy</i> (Robert Jephson)
"	April 14	<i>Cordelia</i>	in <i>King Lear</i> ; benefit
"	May 10	<i>Jacintha</i>	in <i>The Suspicious Husband</i> (John Hoadly)
"	" 14	<i>Portia</i>	in <i>The Merchant of Venice</i>
"	" 15	<i>Fidelia</i>	in <i>The Plain Dealer</i> (Wycherley)
"	September 23	<i>Viola</i>	in <i>Twelfth Night</i>
"	November 20	<i>Perdita</i>	in <i>A Winter's Tale</i>
"	December 3	"	in " " " (by Royal Command)
1780	January 28	<i>Rosalind</i>	in <i>As You Like It</i>
"	April 3	<i>Oriana</i>	in <i>The Inconstant</i> (George Farquahar)
"	" 18	<i>Imogen</i>	in <i>Cymbeline</i>
"	May 4	<i>Mrs. Brady</i>	in <i>The Irish Widow</i> (David Garrick)
"	" 24	<i>Eliza Camply</i>	in <i>The Miniature Picture</i> (Lady Craven)

NOTE.—*The Shakespearean plays quoted were performed in the versions of David Garrick.*

The dates specified, so far as can be ascertained, refer to the first appearance of Mrs. Robinson in the characters named.

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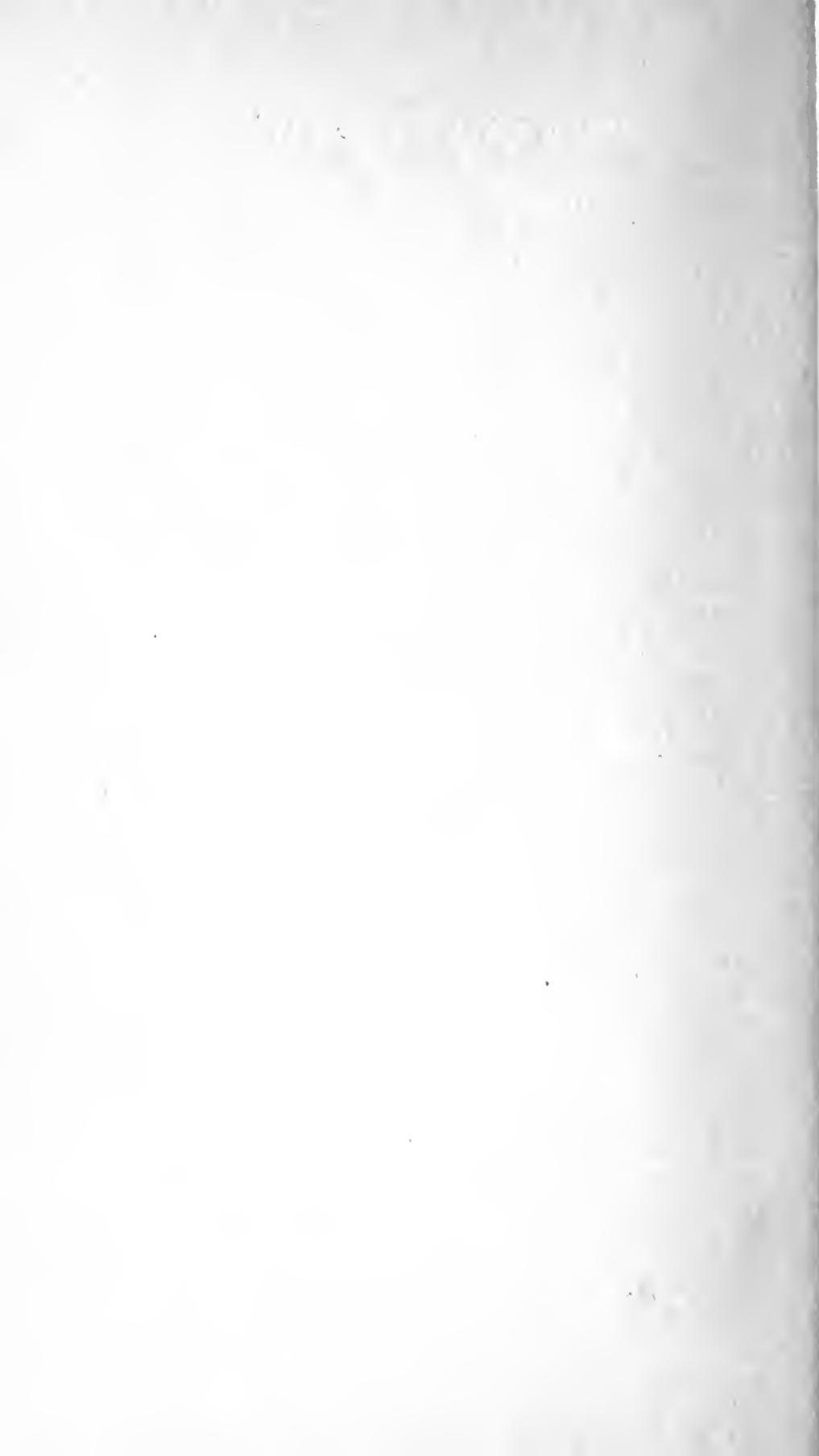
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1801 *Memoirs of the late Mrs. Robinson, written by herself, with some posthumous pieces edited by her daughter, M. E. Robinson*

* These dates refer to the first editions.



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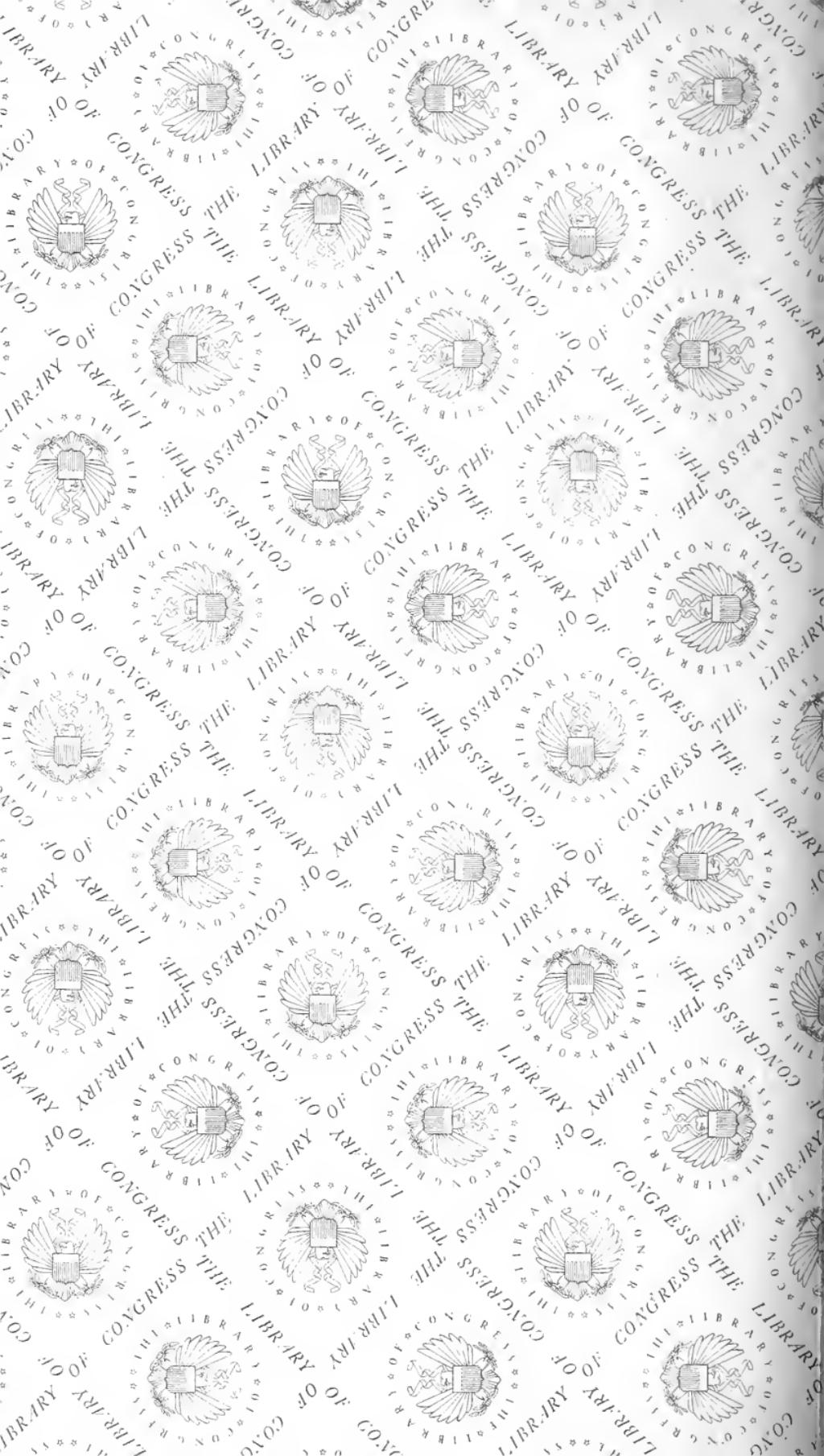
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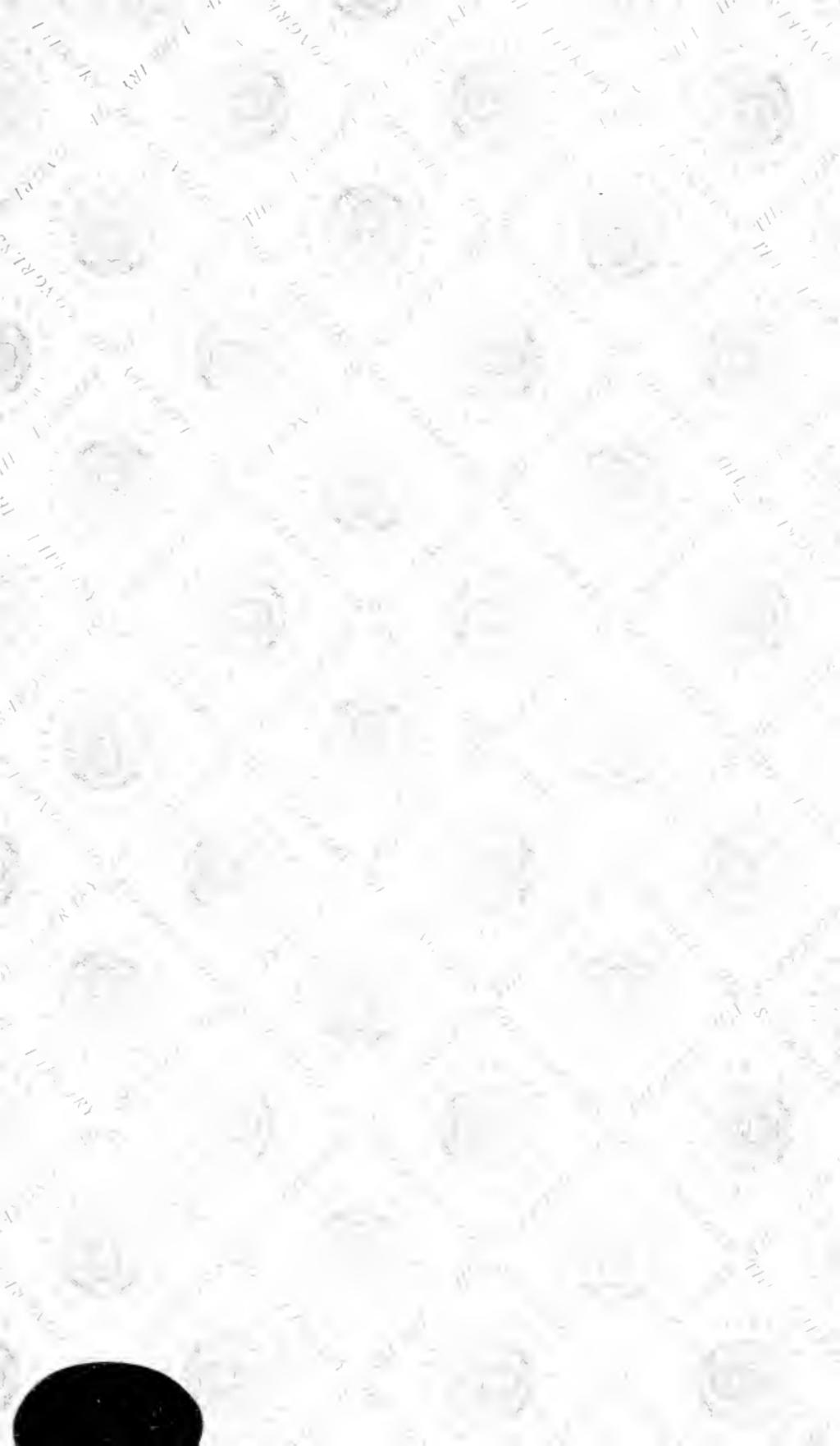
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